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EDITORIAL

IGNATIUS VISION OF CHRISTIAN LIFE
AS IMITATION OF CHRIST

Koonammakkal Thoma Kathanar

PERSPECTIVE ON PRAYER FROM
THE GREEK (BYZANTINE) TRADITION

Damon Geiger OSST

THE THOMAS CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

Varghese Pathikulangara CMI

BOOK REVIEW, NEWS

CHRISTIAN ORIENT

An Indian Journal of Eastern Churches for Creative
Theological Thinking

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Editorial

It is an admitted and recognized fact among Christian scholars today that the Christian heritage is enshrined in three basic traditions: the Syriac, Greek and the Latin. Although each individual Church has her own spirituality (LG 23; OE 3; UR 15-17), distinguishing herself from other Churches, Christian spirituality may also be considered as belonging to one of the above mentioned traditions: the Syriac, Greek and the Latin.

The present issue of *Christian Orient* tries to present before the readers the spiritual vision, at least partially, of the Syriac and Greek traditions. The article on *Ignatian Vision of Christian Life as Imitation of Christ* gives us a glimpse into the spirituality of the Antiochene Church of the early second century, and Antiochene tradition is at the root of both the Syriac and the Greek traditions. Our sincere thanks to Reverend Koonammakkal Thoma Kathanar, who has his doctorate in Syriac Patristics from Oxford University and is at present a research guide of Syriac Literature in Mahatma Gandhi University of Kottayam and teaching regularly in Paurastya Vidyapitham, Vadavathoor, for his enlightening service to the Church.

The article on *Perspectives on Prayer from the Greek (Byzantine) Tradition* goes directly to the spiritual experience of Greek tradition, giving a summarized explanation of the Jesus Prayer. We are very much grateful to Reverend Damon Geiger O. SS. T. for this very enriching contribution. He himself belongs to the Greek tradition of the Melkite Church and was formerly the Rector of St. Gregory the Theological Seminary, Newton Centre (Boston), Massachusetts. At present he serves as the Novice Master of the community of Most Holy Trinity in India. Thus he shares his own living experience with the readers of *Christian Orient* in this article.

The article on *Thomas Christian Spirituality* gives us a picture of the Christian life-style of the first Christians of India, a life-style fully Christian, Eastern and Indian. This Christianity with its faith expression in the Liturgy and the symbol of the St. Thomas Cross, remains always a model for an incultured Christian life-style in the context of India. It is this Christian life-style that the ever remembered Father Placid J. Podipara CMI (+1985) qualified as "Christian in Religion, Oriental in Worship and Indian in Culture".

That God our Father may shower His choicest blessings on the authors of these articles and the readers is our constant prayer. I personally thank one and all who have helped me in preparing, printing and releasing this issue of the *Christian Orient*.

Varghese Pathikulangara, CMI
Editor

CHRISTIAN ORIENT

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

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Editorial BOARD

Editor: J. K. Coetzee, University of Cape Town, South Africa

It is an admitted and long-standing fact among Christian scholars today that the Christian heritage is enriched in those places where the Greek and the Latin traditions have met. Although the Christian heritage has not been a single, unified tradition, it has been a tradition of many traditions. The Christian heritage is enriched in those places where the Greek and the Latin traditions have met. The Christian heritage is enriched in those places where the Greek and the Latin traditions have met.

The present issue of Christian Orient aims to present to the readers the spiritual vision of the Greek and the Latin traditions. The article on the spiritual vision of the Greek and the Latin traditions is a glimpse into the spirituality of the Eastern Church of the early second century, and a look at the roots of both the Greek and the Latin traditions. The article on the spiritual vision of the Greek and the Latin traditions is a glimpse into the spirituality of the Eastern Church of the early second century, and a look at the roots of both the Greek and the Latin traditions.

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That God our Father may show His choicest blessings on the authors of these articles and the readers is our constant prayer. I personally thank one and all who have helped me in preparing, printing and reviewing this issue of Christian Orient.

Ignatian Vision of Christian Life as Imitation of Christ

Introduction

Legend has it that the little child whom Jesus extolled as an example of humility in the midst of the apostles¹ was Ignatius who later became the third bishop of Antioch in Syria.² The story goes that this Ignatius and Polycarp of Smyrna (+155) were fellow-disciples under John the evangelist. Whatever the historicity of these pious stories, Ignatius is the most important theologian in the sub-apostolic period, and he is numbered among the Apostolic Fathers. Ignatius seems to have been martyred during the reign of Trajan (98-117 AD). About the year AD 107, Antioch witnessed some kind of persecution of its Christian population. The elderly bishop Ignatius was arrested and sent to Rome for execution (probably about the year AD 110.)

On his way to Rome he stayed at Smyrna from which he wrote letters to the Churches in Ephesus, Magnesia, Tralles and Rome. While staying at Troas, he wrote to the Churches in Smyrna and Philadelphia as well as

to Polycarp the bishop of Smyrna. These seven letters have come down to us in Greek; we also have a longer Latin recension and a shorter Syriac corpus of Ignatian epistles. These seven letters form a testimony of the Ignatian vision of Christian life as imitation of Christ. In all these letters, his zeal for becoming a real and perfect disciple of Christ stands out remarkably. It does befit a true athlete of Christ, which he claims to be. As regards the period of composition of these letters, it is reasonable to conclude that Ignatius wrote them about 110 AD.

Concept of Theophoros

In all his seven letters Ignatius introduces himself as *Theophoros* which means God-bearer.³ Various theories have been put forth to explain this enigmatic name. That it is a baptismal name adopted by Ignatius carries some credence, but without convincing evidence. But we are not left in the dark either by Ignatius or by his later biographers. *The Martyrdom of Ignatius* is a Third Century work which contains an intriguing elucidation of

1. Mt 18:2.

2. G. A. Williamson, Eusebius: *The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine* (Harmondsworth 1965, repr. 1981), pp. 128, 145-147, cf. Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* III: 22, 36.

3. K. Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers* (The Loeb Classical Library 24, London 1985), Eph (p. 172), Mag (p. 196), Trall (p. 212), Rom (p. 224), Phil (p. 238), Smyr (p. 250), Pol (p. 266). Hereafter cited as *LCL* 24.

this term with reference to the Ignatian concept of his own Christian life. When the Domitian persecution was over, Ignatius rejoiced on account of the tranquility in the Church. But he was personally unhappy for having lost the opportunity for martyrdom. "...he had not yet attained to a true love to Christ, nor reached the perfect rank of a disciple. For he inwardly reflected, that the confession which is made by martyrdom, would bring him into a yet more intimate relation to the Lord".⁴ In this text, true discipleship and perfect love of Christ are identified with martyrdom. A perfect disciple is a martyr. Martyrdom brings the disciple closer to Christ. More than a century later, we hear the same from the great Origen (c. 185-253) who, throughout his life, was yearning for martyrdom, the climax of the life of a disciple. Origen identified perfect discipleship and martyrdom.⁵

The Martyrdom of Ignatius repeatedly asserts the ideal of martyrdom as the sign of perfect love towards Christ. Ignatius was arrested for his faith, and he stood before emperor Trajan who asked: "And who is Theophoros"? Ignatius replied: "He who has Christ within his heart". Ignatius would cite a Pauline text to ground his concept of Theophoros. Trajan said, *Do you then carry within you Him that was crucified?* Ignatius replied, 'Truly so; for it is written, *I will dwell in them, and walk in them.*' Then Trajan pronounced sentence as follows: 'We command that Ignatius, who affirms that he carries about within him Him that was crucified, be bound by soldiers,

and carried to the great (city) Rome, there to be devoured by the beasts, for the gratification of the people'.⁶ The Pauline text partially cited by Ignatius reads: Or what harmony has *the temple of God* with idols? For you are the temple of the living God; as it is said, *I will dwell in them and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they will be my people*"⁷

The above mentioned Third Century text is only an explanatory extension of the mind of Ignatius about his being *Theophoros*. The awareness of being *Theophoros* was in the depth of his mind when he wrote his seven letters. The scriptural background of this conviction is clarified in his reply to Trajan. All the seven authentic letters of Ignatius have the introduction containing this title: "Ignatius, who is also called *Theophoros*..." It is unlikely that *Theophoros* was just a baptismal name for Ignatius; rather it appears to be a deliberate theological title with which he used to explain his own Christian existence at large.

Imitation of Christ

Ignatius writes to the Christians in Ephesus: "You are *the imitators of God*..."⁸ He writes this while he himself is on his way to martyrdom "in the hope of obtaining the privilege of fighting with beasts in Rome, that by doing so I might be enabled to be a true disciple..."⁹ Thus we come again to the idea that a true disciple is a martyr like his Master. Christian life is an ongoing imitation, gradual

4. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, I (Grand Rapids repr. 1981), p. 129. (hereafter as ANF-I).
5. R. A. Greer, *Origen: An Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer and Selected Works* (New York 1979), pp. 48-49, 59.
6. ANF-I, pp. 129-130.
7. 2 Cor 6:16; cf. 1 Cor 3:16-17; 1 Cor 6:19; Lev 26:11-12; Ez 37:27.
8. Eph I:1 = LCL 24, p. 173.
9. Eph I:2 = LCL 24, p. 175.

growth into Christ. "They who are carnal cannot do spiritual things, neither can they who are spiritual do carnal things, just as faith is incapable of the deeds of infidelity, and infidelity of the deeds of faith. But even what you do according to the flesh is spiritual, for you do all things in Jesus Christ."¹⁰ Christians of Ephesus used to resist false teachings because of their being "*stones of the temple* of the Father, made ready for the building of God our Father, carried up to the heights by the engine of Jesus Christ, that is the cross, and using as a rope the Holy Spirit."¹¹ The constant growth into Trinitarian communion is the divinization of Christians in order to form the living temple of the Trinity. This is precisely what is inaugurated in baptism, the mother of Christian initiation and discipleship.

Now we come to an additional exploitation of the theme we are dealing with, and Ignatius gives us a key text: "You are then fellow travellers, and carry with you God, and the Temple, and Christ, and holiness, and are in all ways adorned by commandments of Jesus Christ."¹² This translation is not exact because we have the following terms in the original: *theophoroi* (= God-bearers), *naophoroi* (= temple-bearers), *christophoroi* (= Christ-bearers) and *hagiophoroi* (= bearers of holy things, holiness-bearers, holy-bearers, Holy Spirit-bearers).¹³ It is in this sense Ignatius is *Theophoros*; it is in the same sense Christians of Ephesus are called *Theophoroi*. Every individual Christian has to be *Theophoros* because of his putting on Christ in baptism. *Theophoros* is precisely what a Christian

is according to Ignatian understanding and interpretation. One can in no way overlook the parallels between Christ, Ignatius (a Christian) and Ephesians (= Christians). A Christian is bearing God in himself because of his baptism. His inner self has become the temple for divine indwelling. The other attributes like *christophoroi*, *naophoroi* and *hagiophoroi* are all explications of this existential truth about the nature of Christian life as theophoric. The life and love of Christians are centered around *God alone* and not around *human life*.¹⁴ This is because of the process of divinization of human life in a Christian. Thus ordinary human life is transformed by divine indwelling; The inner indwelling of God in the temple of the human heart makes him God-bearer, Christ-bearer, temple-bearer and Holy Spirit-bearer.

The depiction of the interior transformation that is taking place in our Christian life has some serious moral consequences and practical nuances. "Now for other men 'pray unceasingly', for there is in them a hope of repentance, that they may find God. Suffer them therefore to become *your disciples*, at least through your deeds. Be yourselves gentle in answer to their wrath; be humble minded in answer to their proud speaking; offer prayer for their blasphemy; be steadfast in the faith for their error; be gentle for their cruelty, and do not seek to retaliate. Let us be proved their brothers by our gentleness and let us be *imitators of the Lord*, and seek who may suffer the more wrong, be the more destitute, the more despised; that no plant of the devil be found in you but that you may remain in all purity and

10. Eph VIII:2 = LCL 24, p. 183.

11. Eph IX:1 = LCL 24, p. 183.

12. Eph IX:2 = LCL 24, p. 183.

13. Eph IX:2 = LCL 24, p. 182.

14. Eph IX:2 = LCL 24, p. 184.

sobriety in Jesus Christ, both in the flesh and in the Spirit".¹⁵

In the mind of Ignatius, Christian life is the same as imitation of Christ. It is a life of continuous prayer and self-sacrifice so that others may repent and find God. The life of a disciple should become a preaching so that others may come to discipleship. True Christian life is marked by gentleness, humility, prayer, steadfastness in faith, tranquility, etc. Christians are to be *mimetai de tou Kuriou* (imitators of the Lord). Imitation of the Lord consists in gentleness, suffering, being destitute and despised. These are the means for becoming Christ-like. "For let us either fear the wrath to come, or love the grace which is present,—one of the two,—only let us be found in Jesus Christ unto true life."¹⁶ Either the fear of judgment—future—or the love of grace—present—should direct us to the true life in Christ. The phrase *monon en Khristo Iesou* need not necessarily be translated as above. If *monon* should go along with the real sense of the sentence here we reach the classical theme of Christian life in the ascetically oriented circles right from the apostolic times. Thus the phrase should read, let us be found *ONLY* in Jesus Christ. The concept of single-mindedness in following Christ is implied here. Whatever be the factor that constrains us, let us be *only in Jesus Christ* and

in no one else, in nowhere else! A Christian is unique disciple of the unique Master. He cannot follow Christ with a divided heart. Integrity or undividedness of heart is all that is called for. Thus we come back to the theme of single-minded discipleship,¹⁷ undivided commitment to Christ, imitation of Christ, suffering and martyrdom.

Ignatius is not satisfied with mere verbal profession of faith. For him faith is only the beginning, the end of which is love. Without love, faith is inadequate; faith is to be translated into deeds of love, which perfects faith. So wherever faith and love are united, there is God.¹⁸ Preaching is good only if it is practised by the preacher.¹⁹ The reason for all these is the indwelling and divinizing presence in us. "Let us therefore do all things as though he were dwelling in us, that we may be his temples, and that he may be our God in us."²⁰ Since our God is in us, we are His temples, and hence we are *theophoroi* (God-bearers). It is precisely because of the conviction that every Christian is the living temple of God that Ignatius is dedicated and devoted to the cross of Christ.²¹

Ignatius prays for the Churches so that "there may be a union of the flesh and spirit of Jesus Christ, who is our everlasting life, a union of faith

15. Eph X:1-3 = LCL 24, p. 185.

16. Eph XI:1 = LCL 24, p. 187.

17. IClement XXIII = M. Staniforth, *Early Christian Writings: The Apostolic Fathers* (Harmondsworth 1968, repr. 1982), p. 35; Barnabas XIX: 2,5; Shepherd of Hermas, Mand IX; Vis II: 2,4; III: 3,4; III: 4,3; III: 7,1; IV.1,4; IV: 2,6; cf. J. N. Sparks, ed., *The Apostolic Fathers* (Nashville 1978), pp. 297-298; 195-196; 165; 170; 171; 173; 178-179; 180.

18. cf. Eph XIV: 1-2.

19. cf. Eph XV: 1-2.

20. Eph XV: 3 = LCL 24, p. 189; cf. 1 Cor 3:16; 14:25.

21. cf. Eph XVIII:1.

and love, to which nothing is preferable and (what is more than all) a union of Jesus and the Father."²² The goal of all our trials and tribulations is attaining to God. "It is right, then, that we should be really Christians, and not merely have the name..."²³ To be a Christian not merely in name, but both in name and reality, is the existential challenge before Ignatius. It is also the challenge before every Christian in every generation. Every Christian is to be a *Theophoros*. It is a choice between death and life.²⁴ Believers bear "the stamp of God the Father in love through Jesus Christ, and unless we willingly choose to die through him in his passion, his life is not in us."²⁵ What Ignatius implies here is a union with Christ's martyrdom. Opposite to this realization is bearing the stamp of this world. The contrast between this world and the world of Christ is typically a Johannine theme. There is a choice between the world of death and the world of life.

According to Ignatius the prophets were persecuted for their faith, obedience and religious convictions. They all suffered for the one and only God revealed in Jesus Christ.²⁶ Disciples of Jesus too suffer just because they are disciples of the only

Teacher.²⁷ If God should treat us according to our deeds we are lost. "For this cause let us be his disciples, and let us learn to lead Christian lives. For whoever is called by any name other than this is not of God... turn to the new heaven, which is Jesus Christ. Be salted in him, that none among you may be corrupted, since by your saviour you shall be tested".²⁸ The indwelling presence of Christ is the inner force driving us to doing good. "...you have Jesus Christ in yourselves".²⁹ So the Christians are really Christ-bearers. "I know that you are full of God..."³⁰; and hence they are God-bearers. Jesus Christ is our hope.³¹ Ignatius is a prisoner for Jesus Christ.³² He describes the Christians of Tralles as *imitators of God*.³³ "... it is clear to me that you are living not after men, but after Jesus Christ, who died for our sake, that by believing on his death you may escape death."³⁴ We have hope in Jesus, "for if we live in him we shall be found in him."³⁵ Life in Christ is the motive for imitation of Christ and martyrdom for Christ. "For I desire to suffer, but I know not if I am worthy..."³⁶

Our privations and tribulations as disciples of Christ are nothing unnatural, for they help us that we

22. Mag I: 2 = LCL 24, p. 197.

23. Mag IV: 1 = LCL 24, p. 201.

24. cf. Mag V:1; Barnabas 18: 1-21:9; Didache 1:1-6:2; J. N. Sparks, *op. cit.*, pp. 297-301; 308-312.

25. Mag V:2 = LCL 24, p. 201.

26. cf. Mag VIII: 2-IX:2.

27. cf. Mag IX:2.

28. Mag X: 1-2 = LCL 24, p. 207; cf. 1 Cor 5:7; Mk 8:15; 9:50.

29. Mag XII: 1 = LCL 24, p. 209.

30. Mag XIV: 1 = LCL 24, p. 211.

31. Mag XI; Trall: introduction; Trall II: 2.

32. Trall I:1.

33. cf. Trall I:2.

34. Trall II:1 = LCL 24, pp. 213-215.

35. Trall II:2 = LCL 24, p. 215.

36. Trall IV:2 = LCL 24, p. 217.

may not be deprived of God, that we may one day become real disciples³⁷ worthy of our name. Real Christians "are inseparable from God, from Jesus Christ and from the bishop and the ordinances of the Apostles. He who is within the sanctuary is pure, but he who is without the sanctuary is not pure..."³⁸ What Ignatius means here is the solidarity with the liturgical assembly, worshipping community under the legitimate bishop, presbytery and deacons. It is a solidarity that keeps us in communion with God. This solidarity in worship is a solidarity in suffering as well. "Therefore adopt meekness and be renewed in faith, which is the flesh of the Lord, and in love, which is the blood of Jesus Christ".³⁹ Christo-centric and eucharistic solidarity of Christian life is a much repeated topic in Ignatius. "... his Father raised him up, as in the same manner his Father shall raise up in Christ Jesus us who believe in him, without whom we have no true life."⁴⁰

Imitation in Suffering and Martyrdom

Ignatius is a prisoner longing to fight the beasts in the arena just because of his deep longing for becoming a perfect and real disciple seeking to imitate the sufferings of Christ. His sufferings are intrinsically related to his faith in and love towards the crucified and risen Christ. Otherwise he would be dying in vain. But for Ignatius his own sufferings and death are only part of his preaching about the real death of Christ.⁴¹ True Christians are branches of the cross planted by the Father. Christ's

passion on the cross is a calling extended towards us, his disciples and members. The head (Christ) is on the cross, and hence the limbs cannot be away from the sufferings of the head. The members can in no way be separated from the entire body on the cross.⁴² Christian existence is a crucified existence because of the fact that Christians form members of Christ. Not to suffer martyrdom for Christ is a real peril looming large in the mind of Ignatius.

Ignatius is found worthy of bondage on account of Christ. But it is only a good beginning, and he hopes to be found worthy of martyrdom as well. In fact, he is afraid of the love of Roman Christians who might try to save him from martyrdom. He is not ready to lose the crown of martyrdom because it is sign of becoming a perfect disciple of Christ. If the Christians of Rome follow their own will and do not spare him, he cannot attain to God through martyrdom. So he advises them to please God and not men. "For neither shall I ever have such an opportunity to attaining to God, nor can you, if you be but silent, have any better deed ascribed to you. For if you are silent concerning me, I am a word of God; but if you love my flesh, I shall again be only a cry. Grant me nothing more than I be poured out to God, while an altar is still ready, that forming yourselves into a chorus of love, you may sing to the Father in Christ Jesus, that God has vouchsafed that the bishop of Syria shall be found at the setting of the sun,

37. cf. Trall V:2.

38. Trall VII:1-2=LCL 24, p.219.

39. Trall VIII:1=LCL 24, p. 219.

40. Trall IX:2=LCL 24, p.221; cf. 1 Cor 13:20-30; Rom 8:11.

41. cf. Trall X; 1 Cor 15:15-16:32.

42. cf. Trall XI:1-2.

having fetched him from the sun's rising. It is good to set to the world towards God, that I may rise to him'.⁴³

By becoming a martyr, Ignatius is going to be identified with the word of God which proclaims itself. But his martyrdom is possible only if the Roman Christians remain silent; that is, they should not clamour for his release; nor should they ask him to change his mind. If they want to save his earthly body, the only possible message is a mere noise and not an actual preaching. Martyrdom itself becomes a word that is preached aloud, and Ignatius hopes to become precisely that. The divine altar is ready, and Ignatius too is ready to become the oblation. His journey towards martyrdom is his approaching the divine presence. He wants to end like the setting sun so that he may rise up into the divine kingdom he is eagerly awaiting. "Only pray for me for strength, both inward and outward, that I may not merely speak, but also have the will, that I may not only be called a Christian, but may also be found to be one. For it if I be found to be one, I can also be called one, and then be deemed faithful when I no longer am visible in the world."⁴⁴

The intensity of longing for martyrdom on the part of Ignatius, his passionate appeal to his fellow Christians while approaching his goal of perfect discipleship, are all crystal clear in his letter to the Romans. But the following long text is perhaps the most revealing and vivid:

"I am writing to all the Churches and I give injunctions to all men, that I am dying willingly for God's sake, if you do not hinder it. I beseech you, be not 'an unreasonable kindness' to me. Suffer me to be eaten by the beasts, *through whom I can attain to God.*

I am God's wheat, I am ground by the teeth of wild beasts that I may be found pure bread of Christ. Rather entice the wild beasts that they may become my tomb, and leave no trace of my body, that when I fall asleep I be not burdensome to any. *Then shall I be truly a disciple of Jesus Christ,* when the world shall not even see my body. Beseech Christ on my behalf, that *I may be found a sacrifice* through these instruments. I do not order you as did Peter and Paul; they were Apostles, I am a convict; they were free, I am even until now a slave. But if I suffer I shall be Jesus Christ's freedman, and in him I shall rise free. Now I am learning in my bonds to give up all desires.

"From Syria to Rome, I am fighting with wild beasts, by land and sea, by night and day, bound to ten leopards (that is, a company of soldiers), and they become worse for kind treatment. *Now I become the more a disciple* for their ill deeds, 'but not by this am I justified'. I long for the beasts that are prepared for me; and I pray that they may be found prompt for me; I will even entice them to devour me promptly; not as has happened to some whom they have not touched from fear; even if they be unwilling of themselves, I will force them to it. Grant me this favour. I know what is expedient for me; *now I am beginning to be a disciple.* May nothing of things seen or unseen envy me *my attaining to Jesus Christ.* Let there come on me fire, and cross, and struggles with wild beasts, cutting, and tearing asunder, rackings of bones, mangling of limbs, crushing of my whole body, cruel tortures of the devil, *may I but attain to Jesus Christ!*

"The ends of the earth and the kingdoms of this world shall profit

43. Rom II:1-2=LCL 24, pp. 227-229; cf. 1 Thess 2:4;4:1; Phil 2:7; 2 Tim 4:6.

44. Rom III:2=LCL 24, p. 229.

me nothing. *It is better for me to die in Christ Jesus* than to be king over the ends of the earth. I seek Him who died for our sake. I desire Him who rose for me. The pains of birth are upon me. Suffer me, my brethren; *hinder me not from living, do not wish me to die.* Do not give to the world *one who desires to belong to God*, nor deceive him with material things. Suffer me to receive the pure light; when I have come thither I shall become a man. *Suffer me to follow the example of the passion of my God.* If any man have him within himself, let him understand what I wish, and let him sympathise with me, knowing the things which constrain me."⁴⁵

Ignatius is always afraid that the Roman Christians might try to save him from martyrdom. So he exhorts them all over again not to hinder him from his goal of becoming perfect in his discipleship. "Be rather on my side, that is on God's. *Do not speak of Jesus Christ, and yet desire the world... for in the midst of life I write to you desiring death.* My lust has been crucified, and there is in me no fire of love for material things; but only *water living and speaking in me, and saying to me from within,* "Come to the Father." I have no pleasure in the food of corruption or in the delights of this life. I desire the "bread of God", which is the flesh of Jesus Christ, who was "of the seed of David", and for drink I desire his blood, which is incorruptible love."⁴⁶

Agape could be eucharist as well as the religious meal associated with it. The unity in and through participation in valid eucharistic celebration is a pristine theme Ignatius often focused upon.⁴⁷ Christians should live "with undivided heart" (*en ameristo kardia*).⁴⁸ Division within the heart of an individual Christian or in the Christian community is not conducive to perfect discipleship and celebration of eucharist. "Do nothing without the bishop, keep your flesh as the temple of God, love unity, flee from divisions, be imitators of Jesus Christ, as was he also of his Father."⁴⁹ God does not dwell where there is division or anger.⁵⁰

The faith of Christians is established when they are nailed in flesh and spirit to the cross of Christ.⁵¹ "And why have I given myself up to death, to fire, to the sword, to wild beasts? Because near the sword is near to God; with the wild beasts is with God; *in the name of Jesus Christ alone am I enduring all things, that I may suffer with him, and the perfect man himself gives me strength*,"⁵² Christ's passion is our resurrection (*to pathos ho estin hemon anastasis*).⁵³

There is a contrast between heretics and Christians in their attitude towards their fellow human beings. Christians do love and care for widows, orphans, distressed, oppressed, prisoners, hungry and thirsty.⁵⁴ Ignatius advises his fellow bishop Polycarp to remain a perfect athlete

45. Rom IV-VI = LCL 24, pp. 231-235.

46. Rom VII:1-3 = LCL 24, p. 235; cf. Gal 6:14; Jn 4:10; 7:38; 6:33.

47. cf. Phil II:1-2; III:2-3; IV; Smyr VIII:1-2; Pol IV:1; 1 Cor 10:16-17.

48. Phil VI:2.

49. Phil VII:2 = LCL 24, p. 247; cf. 1 Cor 3:16-17; 6:19; 2 Cor 6:16; Jn 5:19.

50. cf. Phil VIII:1; Smyr VII:2; Pol I:2.

51. cf. Smyr I:1.

52. Smyr IV:2 = LCL 24, p. 257, cf. 2 Tim 2:10; 1 Cor 13:7; Rom 8:17.

53. cf. Smyr V:3.

54. cf. Smyr VI:2; Mt 25:34-36.

(*teleios athletes*),⁵⁵ God's athlete (*Theou athletes*).⁵⁶ In Patristic Christian literature *athlete* is a term indicating Christians who try to imitate Christ by undergoing martyrdom or practising asceticism. It is the mark of a disciple who aspires after perfection and deepening in his discipleship. He is running for the crown of glory. "Stand firm as an anvil which is smitten. The task of *great athletes* is to suffer punishment and yet conquer."⁵⁷

The communitarian dimension of the struggle of an individual Christian finds expression once again in Ignatius. He declares his solidarity with all fellow Christians who are united to the local bishop, presbyters and deacons. The unity that is envisaged among Christians is a eucharistic

unity. This eucharistic unity is impossible without relation to the theology of episcopacy, as understood by Ignatius. Overall solidarity and fellowship of all Christians is nourished by participation in the celebration of the eucharist. Ultimately it is related to the unity with God. This unity and fellowship should not be forgotten in our understanding of Christian discipleship as Ignatius taught: "Labour with one another, rest together, rise up together as God's stewards and assessors and servants... Let your baptism remain as your arms, your faith as a helmet, your love as a spear, your endurance as your panoply, let your works be your deposits that you may receive the back-pay due to you."⁵⁸

Koonammakkal Thoma Kathanar

55. cf. Pol I: 3.

56. cf. Pol II: 3; 2 Tim 2:5; Phil 1:27; 4:3; Heb 10:32 f; V. Saxer, "Athleta Christi", *Encyclopedia of the Early Church* I, p. 96.

57. Pol III: 1 = *LCL* 24, p. 271.

58. Pol VI: 1-2 = *LCL* 24, p. 275; Tit 1:8; 1 Cor 3:9; 4:1; 2 Tim 2:4; Eph 6: 11-17.

Perspectives on Prayer from the Greek (Byzantine) Tradition

Introduction

"Greek" Christianity refers to that incarnation and expression of Church doctrine, organization, liturgy and spirituality, originating in the Churches of the Eastern Roman Empire. It arrived at its classical synthesis in the Patriarchate of Constantinople (New Rome), but was also the ethos of the Chalcedonian members of the Patriarchates of Antioch, Alexandria and Jerusalem, as well as the Churches of Cyprus, Greece, Sinai, Georgia, Russia, Serbia, etc. Today it is one of the major expressions of Christianity (Greek-Latin-Syriac) and is followed by both Orthodox and Catholic Christians in many Churches and cultures.

Some Theological/Spiritual Orientations

Greek Christianity is unabashedly theocentric. It holds that one cannot begin to understand the mystery of man nor the world without first encountering God. Human beings are made in the image of God and are to grow in His likeness. The Scriptures begin with this affirmation: "Then God said: Let us make man in our image, after our likeness... God created man in His image; in the divine image He created him." (*Gen* 1:26,27) This is the basic reality of

man, and without it, man remains unintelligible. Only in relationship with God does he discover his own true identity, nature and goal.

Man is the high point of the creation – higher in honour than the angels – for man assumes within himself the mineral, vegetable and animal orders of creation. Angels do not. Thus man can speak for the creation – and is indeed intended to be the priest, prophet and steward of creation. He is to represent the creation before God, and God before the creation.

His vocation is that of bringing the whole of the creation into a communion of life and love with God. He offers God the praise and worship of creation, and in that very act (liturgy, worship), brings the life of God into the creation. Thus, his highest act is that of prayer, worship, adoration and contemplation. In it, he realizes his own mystery and brings about the communion of all in God.

This is possible because of his basic essence as the image of God. The tri-dimensional God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) is reflected in the tri-dimensional human (body, soul-psyche-mind, and spirit-pneuma-heart).¹ The heart is the moral and spiritual centre of the whole person,

1. Within the Syriac Tradition, this view is also mentioned in the writings of St. Ephrem. "The Three Names (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) are sown in three ways: in the spirit, the soul and the body, mysteriously. When this

the true self, the place where each is most authentically (though not exclusively) in the image of God. Man is called to become a partaker of the divine nature. The Father sends life to the world through His Son in the Spirit. Man subjects his bodily dimension to his soul-mind dimension (reason), and this is subject to his spirit-heart dimension. He unites his spirit-heart to the Spirit of God, receives the God-life which then flows to his mind-soul, body and is mediated into the creation. In this process, creation lives and reaches its goal, and man "becomes himself".

St. Basil writes that "man is the only creature that has received the command to become God." By the divine image, he "looks like" God. By the likeness, he "is like God." As he grows in the likeness, he is divinized, deified, shares the divine nature. St. John of Damascus used the image of the sun to speak of this process. The sun never touches a person, but through its rays, its light and warmth begin to transform the person into itself. He becomes warm and gets a sun-tan. If he stays out in it long enough, he will burn, as he is changed "too much" into the sun in a way his nature cannot bear. So the Father, through His Son and Spirit, transforms the person into the likeness of the Father. This mystery is called **Theosis**, a concept that is central to Eastern Theology and Spirituality.

In the words of a contemporary Greek theologian:

"The central theme, or intuition, of Byzantine theology is that man's

nature is not a static, 'closed', autonomous entity, but a dynamic reality determined in its very existence by its relationship to God. This relationship is seen as a process of ascent and as communion—man, created in the image of God, is called to achieve freely a 'divine similitude', his relationship to God is both a givenness and a task, an immediate experience and an expectation of even greater vision to be accomplished in a free effort of love. The dynamism of Byzantine anthropology can easily be contrasted with the static categories of 'nature' and 'grace' which dominated the thought of post-Augustinian Western Christianity; it can prove itself to be an essential frame of reference in the contemporary theological search for a new understanding of man."²

But this is not a recent idea within the Greek Tradition. Theosis is based on Scriptural ideas; e.g. "Through these, He (God) has bestowed on us the precious and very great promises, so that through them you may come to *share in the divine nature*, after escaping from the corruption that is in the world...." (2 Peter 1:4); "All of us, gazing with unveiled face on the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as from the Lord, who is the Spirit." (2 Cor 3:18); "He has also put His seal upon us and given the Spirit in our hearts as a first installment." (2 Cor 1:22); cf. also Romans 8:9-13; etc.

The Fathers of the Greek Church took up this theme in several writings:

"God became what we are so that

trinity within us is perfected by the Three, it dominates even the sword!" (*Hymn on the Faith*, No. 8) quoted in Beggiani, Seely J. *Early Syriac Theology* (Lanham, Md: University of America Press, 1983) pp. 75-76.

2. Meyendorff, John. *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes...* p 2.

we could become what He is."³
(*Irenaeus, 2nd Century*)

"The Word of God became man in order that you may learn from man how to become God."⁴
(*Clement of Alexandria, 3rd Century*).

"The Logos indeed assumed humanity, that we might become God: the Son of God became man, that we might become God... the true Son of God by nature took all of us upon Him that all might assume God. He, the Word, is God bearing flesh, and we are Spirit-bearing men... God became man so that man could become God..."⁵ (*Athanasius of Alexandria, 4th Century*)

The same theme can be found in the Syrian Tradition, e. g.

"When the Lord came down to earth, to mortals, a new creation He created them, like to the Watchers. He mingled Fire and Spirit in them to make them fire and Spirit within⁶... Fire and Spirit are in the womb of her who bore You; Fire and the Spirit are in the river in which You were baptized; Fire and Spirit are in our baptism; and in the Bread and Cup is Fire and the Holy Spirit... Fire descended in wrath and consumed sinners; the Fire of mercy descended and dwelt in the Bread..."⁷ (*St. Ephrem the Syrian*)

There are even interesting parallels to Theosis within the Indian philosophical traditions, e. g. *Saiva Siddhantha*.⁸

St. Gregory Palamas (14th Century) pointed out that since man cannot actually share the essence of God (only the Persons of the Trinity do this) man shares in the divine energies—which are also wholly God – i. e. God is totally present *both* in His essence and His energies.⁹

As man is penetrated by the divine energies and surrenders to God through synergy, he is divinized—as was the human nature of Jesus in the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor, or the burning bush on Mount Sinai.

Thus, the spiritual goal of human beings has cosmic repercussions—through divinized man, the whole creation would share in the life and energies of God. "For the creation awaits with eager expectation the revelation of the children of God, for creation was made subject to futility, not of its own accord... in hope that creation itself would be set free from slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that all creation is groaning in labour pains even until now". (*Rom. 8:19–22*).

However, sin intervened and temporarily frustrated the divine plan, putting Theosis at a temporary halt.

3. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Adv Haereses*, V., PG 7, 1120.

4. Clement of Alexandria

5. Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation*, 54, PG 25, 192 B; *Ad Adolph.*, 4, PG 26, 1077A.

6. For the word "mingled", Ephrem uses the Syriac term "mzag", which is his term to describe both the union of the two natures in Christ and our union with Him by grace and the Mysteries. Beggiani, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

7. *Hymn on the Faith*, No. 10.

8. Macnicol, Nicol, *Indian Theism, from the Vedic to the Muhammadan Period* (Munishiram Manoharlal: Delhi, 1968 [second Edition]), pp. 166ff and 213ff.

9. Lossky, Vladimir, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co. Ltd., 1991) pp. 70–90.

The Father sent His Son (*the divine Image*) and His Spirit into the world to bring about the Redemption-Re-creation.

Grace, in the Greek Tradition is not a created gift of God, but rather is the presence of the Holy Spirit within us, transfiguring us and causing us to grow in union with God, and thus to become what we are by nature created to be. God's life and Fire are within us, changing us into God. What Christ is by nature, we are by grace, by participation in the divine energies.¹⁰ St. Seraphim of Sarov, a Greek-Russian Saint, wrote that "the purpose of life is the acquisition of the Holy Spirit."¹¹

Prayer in the Greek Tradition

Prayer is the most natural act of man. To be in communion with God is essential for him in order to realize his nature. In fact, it is not so much an act of man as an expression of his nature. Prayer is not what we do, but what we are. In the reality of prayer, we discover and become ourselves. It is more necessary even than eating or breathing. Man stands before God in communion and comes alive. Prayer is not something we give God, but is a gift of God to us. We have the privilege of access to the Father through the Son in the Spirit. It is precisely in the communion of our spirit with the Holy Spirit that prayer consists. While our body and mind (soul) may be involved, they can only do so if subject to the heart (spirit). Thus, ideally, our body (carnal nature, physicalness) is subject to our soul (mind, reason). But this

in turn must be subject to our heart (spirit-pneuma).

The contact with God is made in the spirit-heart-centre of our being—not in our mind. In fact, when we are thinking, we are not praying. Thought is the enemy of prayer...it distances us from God, for we relate to an idea or a concept—not to the reality of God. Thought can only help to lift us to the point where God initiates the contact—communion. Many of the Saints of the Greek and Syrian Tradition commented on this:

"Prayer means the shedding of thoughts...Prayer is the rejection of concepts...Prayer is an ascent of the *heart* to God. In your longing to see the face of the Father in heaven, never try to see any shape or form when you are praying... The beginning of error is the vanity of the mind...which tries to circumscribe the divine in forms and shapes..."¹² (*Evagrios Ponticos*)

"The chief task (of the person who is praying) is to enter into his heart." (*St. Makarios the Great*)

"The heart governs and reigns over the whole bodily organism, and when grace possesses the pasturages of the heart, it rules over all the members and thoughts. For there, in the heart, is the intellect (*nous*) and all the thoughts of the soul and its expectations, and in this way, grace penetrates also to all the members of the body."¹³ (*The Syrian Pseudo-Macarius*).

10 Ibid, pp. 172-173, 213-214.

11 ..., *Revelations of St. Seraphim of Sarov* (Paris, 1932).

12 *De Oratione* Chaps 114-116, PG 79, 1181-1184, 1192-1193.

13 Mason, A. J., *Fifty Spiritual Homilies of St. Macarius the Egyptian* (London: SPCK, 1921) p. 116.

"Sit in the presence of the Lord every moment of your life as you think of Him and recollect Him in your heart."¹⁴ (*St. Isaac the Syrian*)

"To pray is to descend with the mind into the heart, and there to stand before the face of the Lord, ever-present, all-seeing, within you...The principal thing is to stand with the mind in the heart before God, and to go on standing before Him unceasingly day and night until the end of life... In order to keep the mind on one thing by the use of a short prayer, it is necessary to preserve attention and so lead it into the heart; for so long as the mind remains in the head, where thoughts jostle one another, it has no time to concentrate on the 'one thing necessary.' But when attention descends into the heart, it attracts all the powers of the soul, spirit and body into one point there. This concentration of all human life in one place is immediately reflected in the heart by a special sensation that is the beginning of future warmth...This warmth then holds the attention without special effort...From this there follows a rule of the spiritual life: if you keep the heart alive towards God, you will always be in remembrance of God..."¹⁵ (*St. Theophane the Recluse*)

We cannot cause nor force the encounter—it is always a gift of God. But since God wills this communion with us, and we by nature are

oriented to it, we can prepare ourselves for it.

In fact, prayer is always going on in our depths. The Holy Spirit is praying within us.¹⁶ When we "pray", we simply join (tune into) the reality of prayer that is always going on within us. We open up to receive the gift and become aware of the communion we have constantly. We are born "not praying", i. e. because of the Fall, we are born *outside* Paradise, *outside* communion with God. The redemption can even be seen as a re-giving of the gift of prayer/communion. As God wishes to give the gift of prayer / communion, He readily does so. Again, prayer is not something we give (or do for) God, but rather a precious gift He gives us: instant access to the presence of the All-holy and Transcendent God of all. In the Greek Tradition, the goal is not frequent prayer, but continual prayer.

"When the Spirit establishes His abode in a human being this person can no longer stop praying for the Spirit prays unceasingly in him. Whether he is sleeping or keeping vigil, prayer no longer leaves his soul. The movements of the purified spirit are mute voices which chant psalms in secret to the Invisible."¹⁷ (*St. Isaac the Syrian*)

Since God is transcendent, he cannot be experienced directly by thoughts, feelings or images. Indeed, Greek theology is emphatically apophatic in its approach. Apophatic theology rests on the premise that no human

14 From *The Ascetical Homilies of St. Isaac the Syrian* quoted in Allchin, A. M. (ed.) *Daily Readings with St. Isaac of Syria* (Springfield, Templegate Publishers, 1990) p. 21.

15 Chariton, Hegumen of Valamo, *The Art of Prayer: An Orthodox Anthology* (London: Faber & Faber, 1966) pp. 63ff.

16 Rom. 8:14-17, 26-27.

17 Allchin, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

concept is adequate to contain God or to understand God. God is therefore essentially unknowable, except as He deigns to grace us with revelation. As a result, any attempt to approach God through the senses, using devices such as sensory meditations, will have only partial success. These forms of prayer allow us to draw close to God, but we are unable to penetrate deeply with them. God simply cannot be known this way. The apophatic way is the way of negation. The one who prays opens to a passive, receptive state of mind and deliberately enters the darkness of unknowing: coming to God in an open, receptive state, with no predetermined concepts about God that would limit His action in the person. God is "known" by contact, an expression of Him in our depths which transcends all categories, sense images, feelings and intellectual knowledge. Any intellectual image or concept we form of God is an idol—it is not God, but can only point to Him. Therefore in prayer, we must not linger in thoughts or images.¹⁸

Thus, our prayer is *normally* what Western Christians call "contemplative"—a knowledge (in the Biblical sense) coming from the unitive embrace of Love—centred in the spirit/heart—not in the soul/mind. God draws us into our very centre, where we encounter Him in the darkness (or in the light that blinds our "light"). We are the objects, not the subjects, of that experience. As God "knows" us in love, we "know" Him in love. ("In Your light we see light...") This pulls us out of time (Chronos) and lifts us to the experience of Kairos (God's timelessness, His eternity). For this reason, time spent in prayer often passes seemingly very swiftly when

we are in the embrace of this loving Presence.

Hesychasm – The Jesus Prayer

One "school" of Greek spirituality (perhaps the most popular), which pursues this approach to God in prayer is known as HESYCHASM or HESYCHIA, the rest (like the Sabbath rest), or the silence. It refers to inner silence, stillness – image – less, non – discursive prayer. It is called "silence" not because we sit blankly without using words, but because this type of prayer leads the mind and heart into the silence of the spirit, which is beyond the clamour of the mind and the distraction and movements of the body. We spend too much time fighting with the body and the mind instead of moving beyond them into the spirit, from which point alone can we gain control over the body and mind through the grace of God. By hesychastic prayer, we cause the spirit to become active.

Hesychia is not just the silence of mind and heart, but also especially the silence of the false self, the false ego, which is the root of sin. Transcending the false self, we discover our true self, which is Christ. The fundamental goodness of human nature, like the mystery of the Trinity, grace and the Incarnation, is an essential element of the Orthodox Christian Faith. This basic core of goodness is capable of unlimited development—indeed, of being transformed into Christ and deified. (Theosis) Our basic core of goodness is our true self: our heart, our spirit. Its centre of gravity is God. God and our true self are not separate. Though we are not God, God and our true self are the same thing. We are made in the image of God and are to

18. Lossky, *op. cit.*, pp 25-43. Kaisch, Kenneth, *Finding God*, Mahwah, N. J.: Paulist Press, (1994) pp 218-220. Roccasalvo, J. L. *The Eastern Catholic Churches: An Introduction to Their Worship and Spirituality* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1992) pp.16-17.

grow in His likeness. Christ is by nature the true Image of God, and the fullest Likeness. To become God by participation is to find and become our true self—but it will necessitate the death of the false self.¹⁹

The Fall resulted in our being fragmented, our consciousness being broken up into many areas, various "faculties", whereas in our original state in Paradise we were utterly simple and united, "one" in the embrace of the contemplative experience of God, in which we "knew" God, the world and ourselves, and the loving communion binding them into one. It is now considered "normal" for us to be fragmented, to be a bundle of pieces, many of them utterly unconscious of one another, devoid of any interaction between one another, or even conflicting with one another. Our bodily, mental and spiritual dimensions reflect many partial images instead of one. Our shattered awareness no longer reflects the one Spirit, but is taken up with the multiplicities of creation.

Therefore, the practice of Hesychia has two major functions as a spiritual healing process:

- 1) First, it restores us to our primal condition of being "omologos", one-worded, single-minded, one thought. "Blessed are the single-minded, for they shall see God." (*Mt. 5:8*) It leads to inner unity and peace.
- 2) Secondly, it is an ascent to God, for we call on the Name of the Lord and enter into His Presence. (*John 14:6*) We pass from the "death" of illusory existence into the "life" of the infinite Spirit. "When you pronounce to yourself in your heart

the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, then in that Name you have the Lord's whole being. It is His infinite mercy, His boundless wisdom, His inaccessible Light, omnipotence and immutability. Approach this all-creative, all-keeping and all-ruling Name in your thoughts and heart with the fear of God, with faith and with love.... This is why God's commandment strictly forbids us to use God's Name in vain, because His Name is Himself, an uncomplex Being, represented and contained in one single word, although at the same time He is not contained or limited either by it or by anything that exists." (*St. John of Kronstadt*)

During the practice of Hesychia, we make ourselves blind, deaf, mute and even paralyzed to this world—both externally and internally in its impressions vibrating within our minds. We forget the world in our experience of God, for it enables us to fulfill two commands given in the Psalms: *Ps. 46:10* "Be still and know that I am God"; and *Ps 34:8* "Taste and see how good the Lord is."

In a struggle to be faithful, many start enthused in this practice, but give up after a few weeks. This is usually due either to laziness, inattention and disregard; or, more dangerously, to the desire to have holy thoughts, pious clutter in the mind rather than resting in the heart.

But what is the way, the technique, to progress from the level of discursive thinking to that of unmediated, non-discursive union? How does one learn to stop talking (even and especially to himself) and start listening?

19. Keating, Thomas, OCSO, *Open Mind, Open Heart* (Amity, NY; Amity House, 1986) pp 127-132.

The usual Hesychastic method is what is called the "Jesus Prayer", the "Prayer of Jesus", or the "Prayer of the Heart." It was developed first among the early religious in Egypt. Seeking an imageless, non-discursive prayer that would lead to inner silence or stillness (*hesychia*), they disciplined themselves to repeat frequently a short prayer, often involving the Name of Jesus.

Four elements entered into its crystallization:

- 1) Devotion to the Name of Jesus, which is felt to act in a quasi-sacramental way as a source of power and grace. Just as prism focuses light into an intense beam, so does the Name of Jesus make His presence felt intensely. In the Scriptures, it could work miracles.
- 2) An appeal for God's mercy, accompanied by a sense of compunction (*penthos*) and repentance (*metanoia*). Repentance was the basic call of Christ, together with the invitation to receive the Kingdom.
- 3) To remain in God's Presence (or better, to remain aware of and attentive to God's constant Presence) by the discipline of a frequently repeated short prayer. To "pray without ceasing" as Paul commanded.
- 4) The desire for inner silence or stillness through imageless, apophatic, non-discursive prayer of the heart.

These elements came together in the synthesis of the Jesus Prayer, the oldest continually used monologistic prayer in Christianity. It has been

used by more people and in more varied circumstances than perhaps any other. It is one of the greatest treasures of all the Churches.

Three important practices are included in it: the openness to, and awareness of the Presence of God; the entering into the chamber of the heart from the head; and the repetition of the prayer from the heart.

The second and third formative elements were found in the Fourth Century Egyptian desert spirituality in Nitria and Skete, as can be witnessed in the *Apothegmata Patrum*. The Abbas wanted to pray not only at the daily synaxes, but continually, believing that the monk who prays only at synaxis never really prays at all.²⁰ In order to become aware of God's presence, they would recite psalms or portions of Scripture to themselves throughout the day. Rather than long selections, these prayers were reduced to repeating certain parts, lines or phrases. The praying of only one phrase was termed "monologistic" prayer: prayer consisting of one single *logos* or phrase. Among the more popular phrases were: "O God, make haste to my rescue: Lord, come to my aid!" (Ps 69 [70]) and "Have mercy on me, God, in Your kindness; in Your compassion, wipe away my offence." (Ps 50 [51]); or similar phrases which both invoked God's presence, as well as expressing *penthos* and *metanoia*. By repeating this phrase, they combined the "outer work" of manual labour with the "inner work" of unceasing prayer: the whole person prayed and became prayer.²¹

The fourth element (apophatic prayer) was added in Egypt by

20. Driot, Marcel. *Fathers of the Desert: Life and Spirituality* (Middlegreen, UK: St. Paul Publications, 1992) pp 63-69.

21. Ware, Kallistos, "Eastern Ways of Prayer and Contemplation" in McGinn, Bernard; Meyendorff, John; and Leclercq, Jean (eds.) *Christian Spirituality*, Vol 1 (New York: Crossroads Publishing Co., 1988) pp 404ff.

Evagrius Ponticos. This idea of avoiding thoughts and images came from Origen and the Cappadocian Fathers rather than from the original Egyptian desert spirituality. Evagrius propagated this approach in the Fourth Century, but without connecting it at that time to the third element (repetition).

In the Fifth Century, a strong Jesus-centred spirituality emerged, beginning in Asia Minor and Northern Greece. For example, St. Nilus of Ancyra (modern Turkey), who died around 430, urged continuous remembrance or invocation of the Name of Jesus. One generation later, St. Diadochos of Photice took the development a step further. A disciple of Evagrius and Pseudo-Macarios, he was made bishop of Photice and attended the Council of Chalcedon.²² In his works, he linked the first, third and fourth formative elements—but not the second. He taught the repetition of the phrase “Lord Jesus” as a means of keeping guard over the intellect (nous) and heart. Thus, he provided a practical method to attain Evagrius’ non-discursive prayer.

The “standard” form of the Jesus Prayer appeared between the Sixth and Seventh Centuries. In the Sixth the Palestinian monks, Sts. Barsanuphios and John of Gaza, together with their disciple, St. Dorotheos of Gaza, taught the formula, “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.” Early in the Seventh Century in the *Life of Abba Phileomon*, an Egyptian monk, the formula is prescribed as “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me.”

The tradition passed on throughout Syria, down to the Mount Sinai monastic centre and back to Egypt St. John Climacos, a Sixth Century abbot of

the Monastery of St. Catherine on Mt. Sinai, made this type of prayer the core of his classic *Ladder of Divine Ascent*. This book was regularly read in monasteries, especially at the meal during the Great Fast, so that the method spread quickly. All the Greek Churches and monasteries became familiar with it. His followers, St. Hesychios the Priest and St. Philotheos of Sinai developed the theory further in their treatises, although they did not prescribe an exact formula to be used.²³

Between the Fifth and Eighth Centuries, the Jesus Prayer grew to be universal. It was warmly sanctioned by the hierarchy and enthusiastically practised by the clergy, laity and religious. Whenever later revivals of spirituality occurred among the Eastern Churches, the Jesus Prayer and Hesychasm were usually at the centre. However, it was not the only Hesychastic method nor formula used. The Jesus Prayer *per se* is not specifically mentioned in the writings concerning hesychastic prayer of the heart by Pseudo-Dionysios, St. Maximos the Confessor, St. Isaac the Syrian nor St. Symeon the New Theologian.

The practice of the Jesus Prayer was transmitted orally at first, as a discipline of prayer, from master to disciple, by example and spiritual direction. It was only committed to writing at the beginning of the Eleventh Century in an anonymous treatise mistakenly attributed to St. Symeon the New Theologian.²⁴ St. Nicephoros the Monk wrote about it in the Thirteenth Century.

St. Gregory of Sinai came to Mount Athos early in the Fourteenth Century,

22. Bouyer, Louis, *A History of Christian Spirituality*, Vol 1, (London: Burns & Oates, 1982) pp 430-432.

23. Ware *op. cit.*, pp 406 ff.

24. Lossky *op. cit.*, p 209.

seeking further guidance in Hesychia; however, very few of the monks on that venerable peninsula were familiar at that time with the Jesus Prayer *per se*.²⁵ Gregory's writings made it more known and popular. He, together with St. Nicephoros and St. Gregory Palamas used it for a spiritual revival on Mount Athos, which slowly spread to the rest of Greece.

Sometimes the use of the Jesus Prayer is taught in a form synchronized with breathing. St. John Climacos had made passing metaphorical statements to that effect, but it only emerged as a definite variation of the technique/method in the late Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries. On Athos, Sts. Nicephoros the Hesychast, Gregory of Sinai, Kallistos and Ignatius Xanthopoulos wrote of a strict discipline which combined a certain seated posture and control of the breath with the Jesus Prayer.²⁶ This was not an original element of hesychastic prayer in general, nor of the Jesus Prayer in particular, and it should be used (if at all) very cautiously and usually under guidance, (see No. 7 below in the description of the Method), lest it disturb the spiritual or physical well-being of the practitioner.

In Greece in the Eighteenth Century, there was another revival of spirituality. At that time the famous *Philokalia* was edited by St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain (+ 1809) and St. Makarios of Corinth (+ 1805). It is a several volume compilation of writings about the Jesus Prayer and Prayer of the Heart spanning a period of roughly one thousand years. It is available in several volumes in English. A one volume abridgment is available in Malayalam. Translations of the

Philokalia were also prepared which made the Jesus Prayer known in Russia and Romania. There was also a spiritual revival in the Greek Church of Russia in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries. During it, the renowned *Way of the Pilgrim* was written, and later the *Way of the Pilgrim Continued*, which are still classics. Moreover from this time are the writings of St. Theophane the Recluse, who spoke often of the Jesus Prayer.

The Jesus Prayer came into the West at first through the writings of Jugie and Hausherr. However, despite their excellent scholarship, they misrepresented it to some extent – perhaps because they were not actually using it themselves. They presented it as a purely mechanical technique to achieve a certain spiritual condition.²⁷ More recently, the Jesus Prayer has become very popular among Western Christians – to such an extent that it is actually used more extensively today in more Churches than ever before in its history.²⁸

A somewhat similar method was correspondingly used in the Western Churches in a variant form. The writings of Pseudo-Dionysios the Areopagite, an apophatic spiritual writer of the Fifth and Sixth Centuries, entered into the Western Churches. Richard of St. Victor wrote in this tradition in the Twelfth Century and was a major influence of the anonymous English author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*, in the Fourteenth Century. This heritage was followed more recently by Dom John Main, OSB, and his successor, Fr. Lawrence Freeman. In America, it was revived by the Trappist Abbey at Spencer, Massachusetts, under the title of "Centering

25. Ware, *op. cit.*, p 407.

26. Ibid, pp 408 ff.

27. Lossky *op. cit.*, p 210.

28. Ware, *op. cit.*, p. 407.

Prayer", which has become very popular.

This dynamic and method of prayer also finds its parallel in Indian philosophy and thought. One striking in similarity is among the methods of yogic meditation. Dhyana Yoga can be experienced through Jnana Yogic Meditation or Japa (mantra) Yoga methods. The chanting of the Name of God is also a common practice. Deep "meditation" is immersion in the Supreme Godhead. It tends to samadhi, or cosmic conscious state, beyond mind. Mind can be a vehicle for the Supreme as well as a hindrance, unless it is controlled.²⁹ There are differences however.

The Jesus Prayer is often called the "Christian mantra". But, this is somewhat misleading, for it differs from the Japas. The Jesus Prayer always implies a *personal* relationship. It aims not at suspending thought nor attaining cosmic consciousness *per se*, but rather at encountering Someone. It is addressed directly to another Person and embodies an explicit act of faith on that Person as the Only-begotten Son of God. Without the personal relationship and the explicit act of faith, there is no Jesus Prayer.

The actual formula used in the Jesus Prayer exists in several variation forms:

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the
living God, have mercy on me, a
(the) sinner.
Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God,
have mercy on me, a (the) sinner.
Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God,
have mercy on me.

Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on
me.

Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy.
Jesus.

It should be noted, however, that this last variation ("Jesus") is never used alone in the East— it is a Western variation of the prayer. In the East, the Name is considered to have so much spiritual energy to be so powerful, that it must be "diluted" with other words, or it could lead to a state of inner tension rather than hesychia.³⁰

The fullest form is a synthesis of various Scriptural passages: the plea of blind Bartimaeus, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" (*Lk 18:38*); the petition of the Publican, "O God, be propitious to me, a sinner. and have mercy on me!" (*Lk 18:13*), and the confession of faith by Peter, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!" (*Mt 16:16*).

Method of Prayer³¹

- 1) Sit in a comfortable, upright position. The body should be relaxed, but motionless. Movement calls our attention, our awareness, to the body.
- 2) Your eyes should be closed, since most distractions enter through the eyes. The mouth should be closed, and you should breathe only through the nose. This enables the mind to enter into a state of quietude. Slow the breathing to relaxed pace.
- 3) Open your awareness to centre on God's Presence around and within you. Use whatever method

29. For instance, see the detailed study in Pareyil, Jacob, *Christian Spirituality in Yogic Discipline and Meditation* (Bombay: St. Pauls, 1993) *passim*.

30. Ware, *op. cit.*, p 403.

31. Kaisch, *op. cit.*, pp 199–200, 203. *Lighting*, pp 14–15.

for this which is comfortable to you.

- 4) Slowly move your awareness from the head to the heart, your centre. Move your mind down to your heart. If this is difficult, try the following: be aware of the sensations in and around your head. You are probably aware of a sphere of energy around your head. This is where most of us live. Let this sphere of energy begin to get heavy and drift downward toward your heart centre. When you begin this, it may be a little difficult. We are so accustomed to feeling this energy in our heads that we do not know what it would feel like somewhere else. But let that sphere of energy grow heavier and heavier. Let it sink down into your heart. If you have trouble with this, imagine that with each inhalation this sphere of energy is pushed down an inch or so. With every breath, your head energy is moved downward, until your head rests in your heart. Anchor yourself there so that you can perceive through your heart. Stand there in the Presence of God in inner silence.
- 5) Slowly begin reciting the formula. At the beginning, you may need to do this with the lips, or moving the tongue within your mouth. With experience, it should be easy to do it in the mind. Better yet, with more experience, it can be done from the depth of your heart. (i. e., you may have to begin at the bodily level, then the mind/soul, until finally it is from the heart. Usually you will be aware when it moves down from the mind to the heart. If the prayer shifts of its own accord to the centre of the heart, let it go on repeating itself there—you may have

the sensation of being an observer of it. However, this is not due to our efforts, but is a gift of grace.

- 6) If your attention/awareness wanders, gently repeat steps 3, 4 and 5. If you are agitated, work around slowly a bit before beginning your prayer session. Or, the use of the komboschinion (prayer rope) in your hands may serve to bring your awareness back centred on God's Presence. The prayer rope is a custom going back over three hundred years. It resembles a rosary, made of knotted wool—but it is used not for counting, so much as for developing a rhythm to the prayer and maintaining awareness of the Presence.
- 7) The prayer may be timed with the breathing, though it is not necessary—indeed, it is not recommended if it makes you tense or distracted. Often it will automatically settle into a rhythm. If you do so, the rhythm would be as follows:
 - a) with the longer formula.

Lord, Jesus Christ, *(as you inhale, drawing the Lord into your centre)*
 Son of the living God, *(as you exhale, professing faith in Christ)*
 have mercy on me, *(as you inhale, drawing in the Lord's mercy)*
 a sinner *(as you exhale, expelling sin and rebellion from your heart)*
 - b) with only the use of the holy Name:

Repeat the Name of Jesus in groups of three, with a pause after each group:
 Jesus, Jesus, Jesus. *(inhaling slowly)*
 Jesus, Jesus, Jesus. *(exhaling slowly)*

8) No matter what sensations, feelings, images or thoughts occur (even the most pious of thoughts), do not shift your attention/awareness to them – remain focused on the divine Presence. Neither shift the attention to them, nor attempt to resist or suppress them. Let them flow away. Actually, in this way, much inner purification of emotions and thoughts and memories is occurring. Sometimes you may feel strong emotions – let them also simply flow away, neither shifting the attention to them nor resisting them. Strong passions are thus “purified” and released.

9) When you close the period, gently come up from the centring in the heart. Thank the Lord for the time with Him: slowly open your eyes and gently begin to move.

10) This should be done, ideally, for a period of about twenty minutes at least, twice a day.

11) Three possible phenomena in addition to the emotions surging up and flowing away, as mentioned in number 8 occasionally occur during the practice of the prayer.

1) a feeling of inner heat or warmth;

2) the gift of tears;

3) an experience of an inner light (the uncreated Light of Tabor).

These are not to be sought, nor clung to – they are signs of inner purification. When and if they do occur, do not shift the attention to them, but simply concentrate on the Presence – they are all simply symptoms of something God is doing at a deeper level of the personality, which is beyond thoughts or senses.

Books for further Reading on the Subject

Anonymous, *The Way of the Pilgrim*

Chariton, I. *The Art of Prayer*

Evagrius Ponticos, *The Praktikos and Chapters on Prayer*

Gilet, Lev, *The Jesus Prayer*

Isaac the Syrian, *The Ascetical Homilies (of St. Isacc the Syrian)*

John Climacos, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*

Keating, T. *Open Mind, Open Heart*

Lossky, V. *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*

Maloney, G. *Pilgrimage of the Heart*

Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and

Makarios of Corinth (ed.), *Philokalia*

Theophane the Recluse, *Unseen Warfare*

Damon Geiger, O.S.S.T.

The Thomas Christian Spirituality

The expressions *St. Thomas Christians* and *Spirituality* are used in different contexts to signify varying realities. Hence an explanation of these expressions appears to be the first necessity.

St. Thomas Christians

St. Thomas Christians¹ are the most ancient Christians of India, who hail from St. Thomas, one of the twelve Apostles of Jesus Christ. Although there is scanty evidence of their presence and habitat in several places of ancient India², they are found exerting decisive influence all through the ages in Kerala, the south-west coast of India.

As far as traditions, documents and common sense substantiate, this Apostolic Church had already developed herself organically when, in the sixteenth century, she was to en-

counter the Latin missionaries from Europe. Due to the extreme latinization policy of the Portuguese missionaries, the age old Church of St. Thomas Christians was divided into two after the painful event of the Coonan Cross Oath in 1653.³

The fraction separated from Catholic communion later adopted Jacobitism and in the course of history subdivided into the Jacobite Syrian Church, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, Syrian Anglicans, St. Thomas Evangelical Church of India and Malabar Independent Syrian Church of Thozhiyur.⁴

The fraction that remained within the Catholic communion, although it continued to preserve several of its traditions, was highly latinized and westernized in the course of time. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, a small section of this Church

1. Cf. P. J. PODIPARA, *The Thomas Christians*, London-Bombay 1970; A. K. AYYAR, *The Anthropology of the Syrian Christians*, Ernakulam 1926; Father BERNARD, *St. Thomas Christians*, (Malayalam) I Palai 1913 and II Mannanam 1921; ID., *A Brief Sketch of the History of the St. Thomas Christians*, Trichinopoly 1924; L. W. BROWN, *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas*, Cambridge 1956; G. T. MACKENZIE, *Christianity in Travancore*, Trivandrum 1901; A. E. MEDLYCOTT, *India and the Apostle St. Thomas*, London 1905; A. M. MUNDADAN, *History of Christianity in India I*, Bangalore 1989; X. KOODAPUZHA, *History of the Church in India*, (Malayalam) Kottayam 1989.
2. Cf. Mar Abraham MATTAM, *The Indian Church of St. Thomas Christians and her Missionary Enterprises Before the Sixteenth Century*, Kottayam 1985.
3. Cf. J. KOLLAPARAMBIL, *The St. Thomas Christian's Revolution in 1653*, Kottayam 1981.
4. Cf. P. J. PODIPARA, *op. cit.*; X. KOODAPUZHA, *op. cit.*; G. CHEDIATH, *Christian Churches of Kerala*, (Malayalam) Kottayam-Trivandrum 1989.

changed allegiance to the Nestorian Patriarch of the Middle East. They call themselves "Surayees" or "Chaldeans" or "the Church of the East".⁵

A group of the Jacobites was re-united with the Catholic communion in 1930 to constitute the Syro-Malankara Church of India.⁶

Altogether the St. Thomas Christians are counted above six and a half million faithful, and more than half of them are today in the Catholic communion.⁷ A vast majority of the Catholics (more than 3,155,000) belong to the Syro-Malabar Church and celebrate their faith according to the East Syriac or Chaldaic liturgical heritage. In this article I intend to discuss the praxis of spirituality of this Thomas Christian group.

Recently, on January 29, 1993 this Church was raised to the status of a Major Archiepiscopal Church, restricting her jurisdiction within the present boundary of the two archiepiscopal provinces of Ernakulam and Changanacherry in and around Kerala. There are also nine other eparchies in different parts of India which *de Ritu* belong to the Syro-Malabar Church, but *de jure* belong to the Latin provinces of respective places—really an anomalous situation created mostly through the intolerance of the Latin Church in India.⁸

Spirituality

Spirituality⁹ is a term used in various contexts and having different understandings. Christian authors themselves appear to vary in explain-

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Ibid.*

7. Cf. R. G. ROBERSON, *The Eastern Christian Churches, A Brief Survey* (5th ed.), Roma 1995.

8. Though the Latin Church appeared only very late in the Indian sub-continent (after 16th century), she managed to imprison the Syro-Malabarians to a very narrow corner of India, namely, to about 0.47% of the total territory of India, and usurp the whole land for herself. Cf. M. VELLANICKAL, "Biblical theology of the Individual Churches", in *Christian Orient* 1/1 (1980) 5-19; X. KODAPUZHA, "The Indian Church of the St. Thomas Christians", in *Christian Orient* 1/1 (1980) 20-54; V. PATHIKULANGARA, "The Chaldeo-Indian Church", in *Christian Orient* 2/1 (1981) 5-28.

9. Cf. C. JONES-G. WAINWRIGHT-E, YARNOLD (Eds.), *The Study of Spirituality*, Oxford 1986; T. SPIDLIK, *The Spirituality of the Christian East*, Kalamazoo 1986; S. P. BROCK, *Studies in Syriac Spirituality*, Kottayam 1988; J. AUMANN, *Spiritual Theology*, Indiana 1980; P. BROOKS, *Christian Spirituality*, London 1975; D. NEIMAN-M. SCHATKIN, *The Heritage of the Early Church*, Roma 1973; J. M. RAYA, *The Face of God, "An Introduction to Eastern Spirituality"*, Denville 1976; ID., *The Eyes of the Gospel. "A Thorough Comparison of Eastern and Western spirituality with Special Emphasis on the Liturgy and the 'New Life' Christ Gives to Man"*, Denville 1978; I. HAUSHERR, *Penthos, "The Doctrine of Compunction in the Christian East"*, Kalamazoo 1982; ID., *Spiritual Direction in the Early Christian East*, Kalamazoo 1990; G. M. BRASO, *Liturgy and Spirituality*, Collegeville 1980; Q. E. VADAKETH, *Vyakthi-sabhalyam* ("A Study in Oriental Spirituality" in Malayalam), Denha Services 1, Kottayam 1984; ID., *Aradhanadhyathmikatha Nazraneeparambaryathil* ("Liturgical Spirituality" in Malayalam). Denha Services 35-36. Kottayam 1993-94.

ing its significance. While it means the life of Christian perfection for some, others describe it as the entirety of the activities of the human spirit. The existentialists and those who belong to the 'new theology' group explain it as the indefinable spiritual climate in which the human interior activity takes place. The Saints and writers of Oriental Churches explain it as the growth in Jesus Christ, one who is born in the 'image' of Jesus Christ is being continuously transformed to His 'likeness' by the assiduous help of the Holy Spirit. This process of 'divinization' is called spirituality.

There are a few who explain spirituality in connection with the religious institutes (e.g. Benedictine, Carmelite, Franciscan, ... spirituality) and renewal movements (e.g. Charismatic, popular, ... spirituality). The modern man tries to confine it even within the boundaries of nations and cultures (e.g. Indian, African, American, European, ... spirituality). There are also attempts to give it a kind of universal and holistic colour. Thus, they speak of eco-spirituality and holistic spirituality.

Taking all of these into consideration spirituality may be described as *a particular style of God Experience*¹⁰. All creatures yearn for the Creator and it is all the more true with regard to human beings. Thus, individuals and groups are always "on the look out to find ways and means to come to that ultimate union with the Creator God. In certain cases, they even practise strenuous and extremely difficult techniques in order to achieve this goal (e.g. yoga).

God-Experience for a Christian is Christ-Experience

Those who believe in Jesus Christ have their own style of God experience. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me" (Jn 14,6), said Jesus during his last discourse. Through His reply to the question of St. Thomas the Apostle, Jesus was revealing there a great truth of salvation:

'God is beyond human imagination; but the time has come; Son of God has become son of man; *Amman-hu-EI* = 'God is with us'; I whom people call "Jesus from Nazareth" am this God-man; I am the way to the Father; no other way to Him; but I am not merely the way; I am the truth and the life; you know that God alone is the whole truth and the real life; that is to say, I am the true living God whom you are searching for; it is not through me that you have to experience the true living God, but *in me*; only *in me* that God can be heard, seen, looked at, touched and experienced (1 Jn 1.1); in short, the God experience, which is the long cherished desire of humankind, is realized *in me* alone.'

The letter to the Hebrews, by proclaiming,

"In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir

10. Cf. V. PATHIKULANGARA, "Indian Spirituality", in "Christian Orient" 5/3 (1984) 99-104 and "Indian Christian Spirituality ? !", in "Christian Orient" 12/3 (1991) 101 - 106.

of all things, through whom also he created the world" (1, 1-2).

teaches undoubtedly that the real encounter between God and man takes place only in his Son incarnate.

Jesus of Nazareth is not merely an intermediary between God the Father and human beings, but the One *in Whom* they really experience the Father. This identity between the Father and the Son is made crystal clear in Jesus' reply to Philip the Apostle who earnestly desired to see the heavenly Father.

"Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father; how can you say (then), 'show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me?" (Jn 14, 9-10).

St. Paul also emphasizes this fact that all human contact with God exclusively happens in Jesus Christ. 2 Cor 13, 14, the pauline salutation which is widely used in several liturgical traditions, is a very clear expression of this faith vision. The East Syriac or Chaldaic tradition continued to be faithful and attached to this economy of salvation as accomplished in Jesus Christ, the God-man. Hence the faithful are always encouraged to aim at a perfect experience of Jesus as the fullness of their Christian commitment.

Christ Experience is Ecclesial Experience

Christ, we know, is the given God, our God, the one who has shared our history. How can a person who is part of history, as Jesus who lived 2000 years ago, be experienced today? It is achieved only by identifying

oneself with the life and activities of the historical Jesus. The twelve Apostles are considered to be the privileged persons who could directly experience Jesus of Nazareth. The Church, fully conscious of this fact, proclaims them as her foundation, while Jesus himself remains the corner-stone.

"What was handed on by the Apostles comprises everything that serves to make the people of God live their lives in holiness and increase their faith" (DV 8).

Thus, the Apostolic Christ experience is proposed today as the concrete form of 'Christ experience'

Any treatise on ecclesiology today tells us that the Church continues Jesus Christ to the end of time. Jesus himself said it as he was bidding farewell to his disciples: "I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28,20). It is in the Church that Jesus Christ is proclaimed, celebrated, experienced and believed here and now. The authentic Christ experience, therefore, is an ecclesial experience. Through our personal involvement in the life of the Church, we do touch and experience Jesus Christ. This is called the *Messiaic* or Christian spirituality, i.e., touch and experience Jesus in the day-to-day life of the Church, and in Him the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Ecclesial Life is Liturgical Life

"Some years ago a Western visitor is reported to have asked His Holiness Alexis, Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia, how he would define the Russian Orthodox Church. The late Patriarch replied, 'a Church that celebrates the Divine Liturgy'".¹¹

11. R. TAFT, *The Continuity of Tradition in a World of Liturgical Change: The Eastern Liturgical Experience*, in "Seminarium" 15/2 (1975) 446-447.

The Patriarch's reply may sound very strange to the members of the Western and westernized Churches. But it is, in fact, the deep awareness of every faithful in an Eastern Church. The Church is the fundamental sacrament and her life above all is sacramental and liturgical.

Vatican II has nothing different to tell us:

"... it is the liturgy through which, especially in the divine Sacrifice of the Eucharist, the work of our redemption is accomplished, and it is through the liturgy especially, that the faithful are enabled to express in their lives and manifest to others the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church" (SC 2).

In short, we can very well say that the authentic *Christian Spirituality* is experiencing God in Christ in the Liturgy of the Church.

The Church, however, is a communion of different individual Churches (LG. 23; OE. 2). Each one of them is identified through her own liturgy, spirituality, theology, administrative system, monastic and ascetic traditions (UR. 15-17). Their unity consists in one faith, the same approach to faith, namely, the sacramental style of expressing the faith, and in the recognition of the Bishop of Rome as the sign of unity among themselves (OE. 2).

Thus, it becomes clear that the truly *Christian Spirituality* consists in

experiencing God in Jesus Christ through the authentic liturgical celebrations of one's own proper ecclesial tradition. Practising faithful of all Eastern Churches are fully conscious of this reality while the members of the Western and latinized Eastern Churches are not. For them any celebration anywhere in the Catholic communion is sufficient to "fulfil their obligation."

The Syro-Malabarians

The Syro - Malabarians, though they continued to be the true heirs of the original Thomas Christians of India without changing the roots of their ecclesial expression¹², or denying their communion with the Pope of Rome¹³, were forced to latinize their liturgical traditions and westernize several of their indigenous customs and manners during the missionary period in and after the sixteenth century. Almost all the medieval aberrations and accretions of the Latin liturgy were poured on to the Syro-Malabarians. This destroyed not only the authentic practice of their *Liturgical Spirituality*, but even radically changed the spiritual attitude of the succeeding generations. The salvific internal obligation style of their Eastern heritage slowly gave way to the aberrated western mode of external obligation. A kind of bartering system of spirituality began to develop among them. They began to count the activities of piety according to the merit or grace they produced, while the Eastern awareness of liturgy as a celebration of one's own personal commitment in the Church to the person of Jesus

12 Those who separated from them with the Coonan Cross Oath in 1653, were forced to accept the West Syriac or Antiochean liturgical heritage in the course of time.

13 The Surayees of Trichur, though they keep up their original liturgical heritage, have denied communion with Rome.

14 Cf. J. KRAJCAR, *The Christian East and Popes from Leo XIII to Pius XII*, in "Seminarium" 15/2 (1975) 298-315.

Christ was bid farewell for good. They began to ask how much is necessary in the place of 'how far is possible'. Thus the western aberration of reductionist tendency became deep rooted among them!

Second Vatican Council

Several Years before the Second Vatican Council itself, the Popes were emphasizing the restoration and building up of all Eastern heritages latinized and mutilated during the colonial period¹⁴. The Fathers at Vatican II were definitive in proposing a return to the authentic sources of all traditions and a building up based on them. They addressed the members of the Eastern Churches as follows:

"All members of the Eastern Churches should be firmly convinced that they can and ought always to preserve their legitimate liturgical rites and established ways of life, and that changes are to be introduced only to forward their own organic development. They themselves are to carry out all these prescriptions with the greatest fidelity. They are to aim always at a more perfect knowledge and practice of their rites, and if they have fallen away due to circumstances of times and persons, they are to strive to return to their ancestral traditions" (OE. 6).

Though very much reluctant at first, the Syro-Malabar Church also has begun slowly to tread the path shown by Vatican II. Hence, what I propose to discuss here is the *Liturgical Spirituality* which flourished among the St. Thomas Christians up to the sixteenth century, continued to remain among the Syro-Malabarians at least in their mutilated and latinized liturgical books and practices and which ought to be recovered, revived,

practised and built up according to the mandate of Vatican II.

Praxis of the Thomas Christian Spirituality

The Spirituality of the Thomas Christians of India had its definite roots in the Christ experience of their Apostle and Father St. Thomas and the life-situation of their first forefathers. The Fathers united in Vatican II and inspired by the Holy Spirit declared:

"...the heritage handed down by the Apostles was received differently and in different forms, so that from the very beginnings of the Church its development varied from region to region and also because of differing mentalities and ways of life" (UR 14).

The Fathers were, in fact, re-affirming here one of the basic but forgotten principles of ecclesiology, namely, the One Church of God in Christ (1 Cor 1,2) is concretized or formed and developed as different Churches of God in Christ Jesus (1 Thes 2,14). Moreover, they made it clear that each individual Church is formed out of two constituent elements: the "Apostolic Christ experience" and the "Life-Situation of a particular community".

Christ Experience of the Apostles

The twelve, as we mentioned earlier, were the most privileged of all in experiencing Jesus through various phases of his life. The climax of all comes in his resurrection. It remains at the root of Christian faith itself (1 Cor 15,14).

Although the Apostles experienced Jesus through the same events, the Gospels witness to differences in each one's experience. The reactions of each Apostle in encountering parti-

cular happenings during Jesus' life can easily explain this variety in the Apostolic Christ experience. There are more than enough such occasions narrated in the New Testament. We emphasize it here, precisely to show that the differences between individual Churches in their liturgy, spirituality, theology, administrative system, monastic and ascetic traditions can in no way be based solely on their life-situations. It must all the more be attributed to the specific traits of the proper Apostolic Christ experience.

Christ Experience of Mar Thomma Sliha

It is St. John who makes some specific references to *Mar Thomma Sliha* (*Sliha* = Apostle), and all of them appear to be critical moments in the flow of this Gospel narration.

When Jesus knew that his friend Lazarus was dead, he called his disciples together and said: "Let us go into Judea again" (*Jn* 11,7). The disciples were amazed at this decision and forbade him saying: "Rabbi, the Jews were but now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?" (*Jn* 11,8). Jesus, however, showed that he was determined to go and tried to win the disciples over to his decision. But they appear to be slow in understanding what Jesus had meant. They could not take in the significance of Jesus words that this illness is for the glorification of the Son of God (*Jn* 11,4). At this juncture, St. Thomas takes the initiative and encourages his fellow Apostles saying: "let us also go that we may die with him" (*Jn* 11,16). It must be his intimate personal relationship with and loyalty to Jesus that inspired him to take upon himself even the most trying ideal Jesus had ever preached: "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (*Jn* 15,13).

It is during the Last Supper that St. Thomas makes his second appearance. After having spoken at length about his farewell to this world, Jesus added: "And you know the way to where I am going" (*Jn* 14,4). Exactly as it was in the former case, the Apostles could not understand the significance of what Jesus said. When all of them stood staring at Jesus, it was St. Thomas who took courage to ask him: "Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we (then) know the way?" (*Jn* 14,5). Jesus' answer to this question was so spontaneous, as if he had expected such a question. "I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father but by me" (*Jn* 14,6). These words of our Lord are one of the most important pieces of revelation in the Sacred Scripture, the revelation of the real salvific mission of Christ. St. John selects St. Thomas from among the Apostles to be instrumental for this. Why? Perhaps, since he knew St. Thomas from the very beginning of their following Jesus, and because Thomas was so faithful and attached to Jesus.

St. John brings St. Thomas to the fore again, after Jesus' Resurrection. Thomas was not there in the company of the Apostles, when Jesus appeared to them (*Jn*. 20, 24). The news that all others had enjoyed the presence of the Risen Lord brought the greatest grief to him, not because he was jealous, but because he had missed that unique chance. He was so attached to the Lord that he could not restrain himself. He, therefore, burst out saying:

"Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe" (*Jn*. 20, 25).

This passage was misused by western theologians to show St. Thomas'

lack of faith and consequently, this Apostle is known in western Christianity as "Doubting Thomas". But today many biblical scholars argue that it is just the opposite. When this episode is interpreted in the total context of St. Thomas' individuality as it is revealed in St. John's Gospel, it appears to be an expression of deep faith in and intimate personal love for Jesus.

The early Syriac tradition supports this explanation of the modern scholars. Mar Basilios of Seleucia (+468), while he discusses this problem, describes it not as the *unbelief*, but as the *impatience* of Thomas.¹⁵ We quote here a passage from this patristic testimony as translated into English by Thomas Halton:

"...He (St. Thomas) wanted to see Jesus with his eyes and refused to believe his ears...Longing to see, Thomas protests his disbelief in the hopes that he may be allowed to see. 'You (Christ) will dissolve my lack of faith', he says, 'by appearing. I will put my finger in the place of the nails. I will embrace the Lord whom I love. ...As an unbeliever I will see him, and as a believer I will embrace and enjoy him. ...I want to see the Lord, not to hear about him...' But the Lord appeared again and dispelled both the sorrow and the doubt of his disciple. What did I say? He did not dispel his doubt, but he satisfied his desire. '...You (St. Thomas) looked for me (Jesus) when I was not there; now take advantage of my presence. I knew your wish in spite of your silence.

Before you spoke to me I knew what was on your mind. ...I am waiting on you, witnessing your impatience."¹⁶

See how clear is the understanding of the Syriac tradition. Since Jesus showed such magnanimity to his Apostle, his response to Jesus was also something extraordinary. "My Lord and my God", is the most complete affirmation of Christ's identity, to be found in the lips of anyone in the Gospel, states Jerome Biblical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. John.¹⁷ Besides all this, in St. Thomas we have an undisputable witness to Jesus' Resurrection, on which the Christian faith is built up.

This biblical analysis reveals to some extent the uniqueness of St. Thomas the Apostle and his Christ experience. In like manner, we can analyze and bring out the uniqueness of St. Peter or St. Paul or St. James or anyone among the Apostles. This uniqueness in Apostolicity, I believe, enters the very constitution and expression of each individual Church. Thus, proper Apostolicity stands as an important principle of unity and diversity among the different individual Churches.

The Semitic and Dravidian Life-Situation

After having discussed the uniqueness of the Apostolicity of the Thomas Christians, we must now think of the other constituent element, namely, their life-situation. It appears to be a synthesis of two different cultural elements, the Semitic and the Dravidian.

15 PG. 28, 1081-1092.

16 A. HAMMAN (Ed.), *The Paschal Mystery*, "Ancient Liturgies and Patristic Texts", Staten Island 1969, pp. 121-122; cf. also, the *Madrasa*, homiletic hymn for the feast of St. Thomas the Apostle on July 3 in BEDJAN 3, 477.

17 B. VAWTER, art. *The Gospel According to St. John*, in JBC, London 1968, 464.

In the light of recent excavations in Indus Valley, and further researches done on the evidence gathered from there, most of the scholars have arrived at the conclusion that the ancient civilization of Harapa, Mohanjadaro and Chanbu (2nd half of the 3rd millennium B. C.) was most probably Dravidian. These Dravidians were gradually pushed to the south, as the Aryans began to occupy North India. The people of South India are mostly of this Dravidian stock and their cultural background was predominantly Dravidian even from before the Christian era.¹⁸

Only four autonomous Churches developed outside the *limes Romanus*, outside the limits of the Roman Empire. They are the Churches of India, Persia (present Iran), Edessa and Mesopotamia (present Iraq). All of them look to St. Thomas as their direct or indirect Apostle. The Church of Edessa held that she was founded by Mar Addai, a direct disciple of

St. Thomas the Apostle, while the Church in Mesopotamia venerates Mar Mari, Mar Addai's disciple, as her founder. The Churches in India and in Persia always claimed St. Thomas himself as responsible for their evangelization¹⁹. Thus, it becomes clear that, the Apostolic heritage of all these Churches is the same, namely, the Christ experience of St. Thomas the Apostle.

It is almost an accepted fact that India had commercial relations with Palestine and Middle Eastern countries even as early as the tenth century B. C. We do not intend to discuss or prove here the details of this historical fact. We only make use of the conclusions drawn by a research scholar, Fr. Thomas Puthiakunnel, in an article, *Jewish Colonies of India Paved the Way for St. Thomas*.²⁰ Accordingly, the seven churches founded by St. Thomas on the Malabar coast²¹ were all situated in or very near to the ancient Jewish

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18. Fr. Placid J. PODIPARA has tried to show the probatable ethnical relationship between the Chaldeans of Middle East and the Thomas Christians of Malabar, of course, relying on the authority of E. B. HAVELL and H. C. E. ZACHARIAS, in one of his books, *The Rise and Decline of the Indian Church of the Thomas Christians*, Kottayam 1979, pp. 8-9. The Chaldeans are shown to be the cultural inheritors of ancient Sumerians and the Thomas Christians of Kerala, of the ancient Dravidians. He has substantiated it both through a linguistic comparison and through the similarity in customs and usages. Cf. also, K. M. PANIKAR, art. *History of India*, in "Foodor's 1975 Guide to India". Hodder-Stoughton 1975, p. 114; W. F. ALBRIGHT, *From the Stone Age to Christianity* (2nd ed.), Garden City 1957, p. 30; E. B. HAVELL, *History of Aryan Rule in India*, London 1918, p. 129.
 19. P. J. PODIPARA, *The Rise and Decline of the Indian Church of the Thomas Christians*, op. cit., pp. 5-6. Remember that Mar Addai and Mar Mari are known as the Apostles of the East and the first *Anaphora* or *Quddasa* used in East Syriac or Chaldaic Churches is named after them.
 20. T. PUTHIAKUNNEL, art. *Jewish Colonies of India Paved the Way for St. Thomas*, in *The Malabar Church*, Symposium in honour of Rev. Placid J. PODIPARA CMI, OCA 186, Roma 1970, pp. 187-191.
 21. The seven churches on the Malabar coast are, at Crangannore, Parur, Palayur, Quilon, Kokkamangalam (near the Jewish colony of Muttom), Niranam (near Quilon) and Chayal.

colonies²². It shows that the original Christians of India had definite links with the Jewish people.

According to reliable sources, not only the Church in India, but the other three 'Thomite' Churches also had a Jewish background at their formation. In each of those places, there were Jewish settlements of those who were left behind after the Babylonian captivity²³. Thus, we come to the conclusion that all the 'Thomite' Churches were built upon a synthesis of *two cultures*, the Jewish and the indigenous. In the case of the Church in India it was a synthesis of Jewish and Dravidian or Semitic and Indian cultures.

When there is such intimate unity between all Chaldaic Churches, both in the Apostolic heritage and in the life-situation, the two determining factors of all individual Churches, it is in no way wise or prudent to deny any kind of identity in their liturgical worship which is the expression of the Church, even at its initial stage. Let us not forget here the famous dictum *lex orandi lex credendi*. In fact, all these Churches had and still have only one liturgy, but with each one's specifications in details, and this is known the East Syriac or Chaldaic Liturgy.

The Liturgy of the Thomas Christians

It has become clear now that the liturgy of the Thomas Christians of India is the East Syriac or Chaldaic

Liturgy. All other conjectures are unwarranted, having foundation neither in history, nor in tradition nor in mere common sense. The faith is, in fact, the total commitment of a particular community to the Christ experience awakened in it through the first testimony or witnessing of the Apostle. This original experience is to be repeatedly awakened in it, in order that it may grow to maturity and fullness and be transmitted to posterity. The specific character of human salvation and of this particular community, namely, the character of "already and not-yet", demands the reawakening of the original experience as often as possible. Here is the relevance of the liturgy of the Church.

The Thomas Christians of India together with the other three 'Thomite' Churches have arranged it in their magnificent system of the "Liturgical Cycle". The Eucharistic celebration, Sacraments, Sacramentals and the Liturgy of the Hours are systematically arranged in the liturgical year so that the faithful are brought to the supreme experience of God in Jesus Christ — the authentic Thomas Christian Spirituality.

The Thomas Christian Liturgical Year

The Thomas Christians have given form to a beautiful and elaborate system of the liturgical year, centred around the Christ-event, celebrating and experiencing the whole salvific dispensation²⁴. Six major celebrations

22. T. PUTHIAKUNNEL, *art. cit.*, p. 190. The only exception appears to be the church at Chayal, which was then one of the famous commercial centres in Malabar, and the Jews ought to have had frequent contact with this market for forest articles.
23. G. EVERY, *Understanding Eastern Christianity*, Placid Lecture Series 1, Rome-Bangalore 1978, pp. 7f.
24. Cf. V. PATHIKULANGARA, *Mar Thomma Margam*, Kottayam 1989, pp. 49-103 and *The Liturgical Year of the Syro-Malabar Rite*, in "Ephemerides Liturgicae" 90/2 (1976) 173-196.

in salvation history control the whole liturgical year. They are; 1. Jesus' Nativity-Epiphany, 2. Resurrection, 3. Pentecost, 4. Transfiguration, 5. Exaltation of the Cross, and 6. Parousia. It is interesting to note that the whole thing is arranged exactly in the pattern of the first proclamations of Apostles Peter and Paul in the Acts of the Apostles.²⁵

The celebration of *Nativity - Epiphany* marks the historical beginning of Jesus of Nazareth and *Resurrection* the culmination of his life on earth. Thus the first two major celebrations project Jesus of Nazareth and the accomplishment of human salvation in him, definitely looking back to and celebrating all the salvific interventions of God in the Old Testament. The *Pentecost* emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing the already accomplished salvation to everyone in history. The *Transfiguration* proclaims the real transformation of all the faithful into Jesus Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit. The *glorious Cross*, the unique and unparalleled symbol of Jesus' Resurrection is also a symbol of the universal transformation into Jesus Christ and thus a visible sign of the whole salvific dispensation, perfected in Jesus Christ. The *Parousia* is the typical expression of the eschatological fulfilment, the life in the heavenly kingdom.

The arrangement of the liturgical year in nine periods, beginning with the "Weeks of Annunciation" (*Lk* 1, 26-38) and concluding with those of "Dedication of the Church" (*1 Cor* 15, 28) gives, in fact, a marvelous experience of salvation to the faithful.

All the members of this heritage are expected to adapt themselves to this basic arrangement that their spiritual pursuit be authentic and ecclesial.

Raza or Qurbana

Raza, the "Mystery" or *Qurbana*, the "Offering", i.e., the Eucharistic celebration among the Thomas Christians, is a summary of the whole liturgical year and the centre of all their activities.²⁶ As is the case in all Churches, this Church also enjoys a full and complete experience of Jesus in this unique celebration. It is also the full expression or manifestation of this Church. All the spiritual and even secular activities draw their vitality from this basic celebration.

It is the resume of the whole mystery of salvation; it is also a summarized celebration of human commitment to Jesus Christ. No one can lead a life of faith without knowing Jesus and committing himself unconditionally to him. In order to know him, one should search for him; deep meditation on the mystery of Christ and consequent conviction are unavoidable factors for true knowledge. The believers should have at least the minimum knowledge about the details of the Holy Eucharist in order to celebrate it fruitfully. One gets it only through constant effort, and the sacrifice required for that is also part of the offering in the Eucharist. The Church authorities, the Bishops, priests and religious, have a grave obligation in guiding and leading the believers to this knowledge. Each of the faithful is also obliged to take up the sacrifice required for celebrating it most becomingly.

25. Cf. *Acts* 2, 14-36; 3, 11-26; 4, 8-12; 10, 34-43; and 13, 13-41; for details cf. chapter V.

26. Cf. V. PATHIKULANGARA, *Nammude Qurbana* (Malayalam), Kottayam 1986.

Sacraments and Sacramentals

The Sacraments (Eastern term Mysteries) are celebrations during the decisive movements in the life of faith. They reveal the sacramental nature of the Church, which is in fact the fundamental or basic Sacrament. The role of the seven sacraments is more or less clear to all. The Sacraments of Initiation introduce and help the faithful to make progress in the life of faith, while the Sacrament of Reconciliation marks the return of the lost; Ordination is the proclamation of one's readiness to minister to the Church, while Marriage is for building up the community of faithful; the Anointing of the sick proclaims the heaven-oriented or eschatological nature of Christian faith.

There are a number of special occasions in the life of faith besides those decisive ones. The faithful have to proclaim their basic commitment in those occasions as well. Such celebrations in the Church are called the *Sacramentals* (e.g. Blessing of a house). They are special celebrations through signs and symbols, having almost the same characteristics of the Sacraments. They are powerful to purify the believers and their surroundings because of their relation to the Sacraments. Obviously, these celebrations are the occasions to the believers for proclaiming their faith all through their life (SC 60-61). Thus, the need to adapt them according to the change of situation.

The Liturgy of the Hours

The Liturgy of the Hours²⁷ (Eastern term Divine Praises) is the

proclamation of faith in detail according to the various hours, days, weeks and seasons of the liturgical year. It is, in fact, an exquisite form of worship which extends the spirit and the reality of the Holy Eucharist to the hours and moments of the day and seasons of the year. In the course of time, it happened to be considered as the official prayers of priests and religious. It began to be called the *Canonical Hours*, i. e., the determined prayers which must be recited by deputed persons at fixed hours according to the prescriptions of canon Law. This attitude of external obligation in the case of liturgical celebrations should be changed. The second Vatican Council has taught the same.

The Liturgy of the Hours is a liturgical rite in the Church that celebrates and proclaims her faith; it is not the special prayer of any particular section, but of all. According to the role and situation of the different members of the Church, there shall be also variations in length, solemnity and timings of celebrating the various hours.

The history of the St. Thomas Christians of India up to the 16th century is the best example of it. The Liturgy of the Hours was perfectly observed, as liturgical celebrations, seven times a day, by Bishops and the religious or monastics. Ordinary priests and faithful, however, arranged it as celebrations, twice a day, namely, the *Ramsa* (evening liturgy) at dusk and the *Lelja-Sapra* (night and morning liturgy) at dawn. These celebrations twice a day were solemnly observed in all parish churches of the Thomas

27. Cf. V. PATHIKULANGARA, *Divine Office in Malabar Liturgy*, in "Ephemerides Liturgicae" 88/11 (1974) 131-141 and *Yamapraridhana*, Preface in *Mathru Stavangal* ("The Liturgy of the Hours and the Propria of Qurbana for the Feasts of our Lady in the Syro-Malabar Liturgical Year" in Malayalam) Denha Services 34, Kottayam 1993, pp. v - xxiv.

Christians and the faithful participated in them according to their convenience.

Thus, the *Qurbana*, Sacraments, Sacramentals and the Liturgy of the Hours properly set in the Liturgical Year is the basic frame-work of Thomas Christian Spirituality. The *Feasts and Fasts* according to the liturgical year also contribute substantially to the formation of Spirituality in this tradition. There are also some other activities of piety which help one to grow in the spiritual life. We would like to include some explanation of those practices too in this discussion.

Veneration of the Cross and Evangelion

Most of the historians, foreign travellers and European missionaries have described the St. Thomas Christians of India as a community showing exceptional veneration for the Holy Cross and *Evangelion*, the "Gospel Lectionary"²⁸. They had their own version of the Cross, the *St. Thomas Cross*, and the Bible, the *Pschitta*. They used to adorn the Cross and the *Evangelion* with precious metals like gold, silver, and so on, since they were considered the symbols of Christ's victory and naturally of their own victory.²⁹

Mar Thomma Sliba, the "St. Thomas Cross"

Ancient documents testify that this typical Cross was venerated in

all the churches and chapels of St. Thomas Christians. The Portuguese historian Antonio de GOUVEA writes thus in 1606:

"The old churches were all built in pagoda-fashion, but all, full of Crosses like those of St. Thomas miracle Cross (at Mylapore)..... Hence one can see how much older than Portuguese time is the veneration, love and shape of the Cross. For the ancient churches built before, long before the coming of the Portuguese, were all ornamented with them, both painted and graven"³⁰.

It was given the most honourable place also in their houses and institutions. The original model of it is seen in the chapel of *Periyamala* (St. Thomas Mount), Madras. It is a special type of Cross carved on granite stone³¹. According to an ancient local tradition, St. Thomas the Apostle fell dead a martyr on this particular granite stone. The faithful kept it sacred and at a later stage the Cross, the symbol of their faith, was engraved on it. Modern scholars fix the date of engraving somewhere around 650 A.D.³².

In the sixteenth century, as the western missionaries were digging the ground to reconstruct the chapel on St. Thomas Mount, they happened to come across this special Cross. It was on March 23, 1547³³. When the construction was over, they fixed it to the rear wall of the main altar at the

28. Cf. VINCENZO MARIA, *Viaggio all'Indie Orientale*, Roma 1672, ch. 4.

29. *Ibid.*

30. Antonio de GOUVEA, *Journada de Arcebispo de Goa*, Goa 1606, p. 204.

31. Cf. V. PATHIKULANGARA, *Church and Celebration*, Kottayam 1986, pp. 17-21.

32. J. VAZHUTHANAPALLY, *Archeology of Mar Sliba*, Kottayam 1990, pp. 12-13.

33. A. M. MUNDADAN, *History of Christianity in India*, I, Bangalore 1989, p. 422.

eastern end. It remains there to the present day.

On the 18th of December 1558 during the Gospel reading at the Holy Mass, this Cross sweated blood and water³⁴. According to the testimony of the missionaries, the miracle was repeated for several years on the same date and in the same manner. They informed the Pope of this miracle and obtained 'permission from him to celebrate *December 18th* as the feast of the Mylapore Cross's apparition.

The St. Thomas Cross is the dynamic symbol of the death and resurrection of Jesus in the Indian context. It proclaims the Theological, Christological, Pneumatological and Ecclesiological dimensions and specifications of Christian faith.

It is an empty Cross, namely, a Cross without the dying figure of Jesus Christ. In imitation of the empty tomb, this empty Cross symbolizes the resurrection of Jesus.

The four tips of this Cross are designed like blooming buds. The bud is always a symbol of new life. New life is restored to man in Jesus' resurrection. Thus the shape of this Cross itself proclaims the resurrection of Jesus.

The Holy Spirit that descends upon the St. Thomas Cross is yet another symbol of resurrection. As St. Paul teaches, the Holy Spirit transforms Jesus' flesh-body into spirit-body and thus quickens the dead Jesus Christ (*Rom 8, 11*).

According to several scholars, this particular Cross is erected upon

a lotus. Although, it is not proved beyond doubt, a Chinese Cross, erected on a lotus flower, coming from the same era, is a very good substantiation for the assumption of the scholars. The lotus, being the symbol of Buddhism, had turned out to be India's own symbol because of the influence of Buddhism in India, during and immediately after the reign of the great Emperor Ashoka. Thus the Cross erected on a lotus, is a living symbol of faith in the risen Lord, established in India.

The lotus in the St. Thomas Cross is situated over three steps. The symbolism of steps or ladders is evolved in Christianity in connection with biblical (*Gen 28, 12*) and liturgical traditions.³⁵ The three steps signify either heaven or calvary. In the case of this Cross, the stress is on calvary and thus they signify the death of Jesus.

Thus the St. Thomas Cross remains a unique symbol that proclaims the acceptance of Jesus Christ, who accomplished human salvation through his death and resurrection, in the Indian subcontinent.

Ancient models of the St. Thomas Cross are found in the Jacobite churches at Kottayam and Kadamattam, and adjacent to the Syro-Malabar churches of Muttuchira, Alengad, Kothanellur and so on, all in Kerala.³⁶

Devotion to this particular Cross is widespread among the St. Thomas Christians. There are several Churches named after the Cross. There are also famous pilgrim centres like Malayattoor where this devotion is fully displayed.

34. ID., p. 423.

35. Cf. G. FERGUSON, *Signs and Symbols in Christian Art*, Oxford 1977; M. GOUGH, *The Origins of Christian Art*, London 1973.

36. Cf. J. VAZHUTHANAPALLY, *op. cit.*

Evangelion, the "Gospel Lectionary"

The Gospel Lectionary is the symbol of Jesus Christ in the Thomas Christian liturgical heritage. It contains the Gospel pericopes which are proclaimed during liturgical celebrations. This *Evangelion* book is usually beautifully bound and decorated with a St. Thomas Cross on the front. It is always kept closed on the right hand side of the altar. This is an action that proclaims the credal formula, "He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand side of His Father." The reverence shown to the Gospel Lectionary is the reverence shown to Jesus Christ himself.³⁷

The St. Thomas Christians carry in procession on important occasions and festivals the St. Thomas Cross and Gospel Lectionary. Very often such processions go round the Cross erected in the church yard. They used to erect shrines in honour of the Cross on way-sides and prominent places, so that the victorious Cross may stand out as a witness to their Christian commitment which is essentially eschatological. They used to pour oil, light candles, set flowers and burn incense before this Cross in order to show their unique respect for it.

According to the testimony of western missionaries, the most precious treasures of St. Thomas Christians are this St. Thomas Cross and the *Evangelion* book. They keep them on the altar and take them out of the sanctuary on rare occasions in procession. During such occasions the

faithful used to kiss them with high respect.³⁸

Feasts and Fasts

Feasts: The Thomas Christians used to celebrate the feasts of their liturgical cycle most becomingly. Important moments in the life of Jesus or related to the Christ-event and human salvation, such as Christmas, Epiphany, Easter, Pentecost, Transfiguration, Exaltation of the Cross and so on rank always first among the celebrations. Then come the feasts of the Blessed Virgin Mary, their own Apostle St. Thomas etc. The feast of the patron saint of every community is also very solemnly celebrated. *Dukrana*, the death anniversary of St. Thomas the Apostle on July 3 is celebrated in several places exactly as the death anniversary of the father of the family.

We can always distinguish between the internal and external aspects of feast celebration. With regard to the internal aspect, since it directly relates the faithful to the Christ-event, the St. Thomas Christians are always sensitive in making use of the authentic signs and symbols which definitely lead them to the source. As to the external aspect, they are always keen in making use of the signs and symbols in their life-situation.³⁹ Thus the externals such as flag-hoisting, decorations, processions are all conducted according to the local cultural systems, while the internals, i.e., liturgical celebrations, are performed exactly according to the basic ecclesial system. I would like to clarify it through an example.

37 V. PATHIKULANGARA, *Church and Celebration*, pp. 16-17.

38 Cf. VINCENZO MARIA, *op. cit.*

39. Cf. P. J. PODIPARA, *The Social and Socio-Ecclesiastical Customs of the Syrian Christians of India*, in ECQ 7(1947) 222-236; ID., *Hindu in culture, Christian in Religion, Oriental in Worship*, in "Östkirchliche Studien" 8(1959) 82-104; ID., *The Thomas Christians and Adaptation*, in ECR 3/2 (1970) 171-177.

Denha (Epiphany) for the St. Thomas Christians is the celebration of the Baptism of Jesus in River Jordan. Basically it is the manifestation of the Holy Trinity through the humanity of Jesus. Practically it is also the presentation of Jesus as the light and life of the world.

The liturgical celebrations on this feast day are exactly the same for all St. Thomas Christians. But as to the external forms of this celebration there is remarkable difference between the northern region of Kerala and the southern region. In the north this feast is known as *Pindipperunal*, while in the south they call it *Rakkulipperunal*⁴⁰

The popular celebrations of *Pindipperunal* include the erecting of a plantain trunk (*pindi*), specially decorated, in front of every St. Thomas Christian house with many torches attached to it. In the night previous to the Epiphany celebration, after the *Ramsa* or evening prayers, the family members go around it in procession, singing a Syriac hymn, which means "God is light" (*El-paija*). This appears to be an attempt to honour becomingly Jesus, "the light of the world and life of all".

The popular celebration in the south stresses another aspect of the same feast, namely, the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan. In imitation of Jesus' Baptism, the ancient Thomas Christians used to perform a *ritual bath* in the nearby ponds or rivers, singing psalms and other religious songs in the night (*Ravu*) previous to the feast of Epiphany after the *Ramsa* or evening prayer. Thus the feast began to be known as *Rakkuli-*

pperunal (feast with a night bath).

There are several such local modulations and specifications for all important feasts. It is impossible to elaborate all of them within the limits of this discussion.

Fasts: The Thomas Christians are found to have great love for fasting by almost all European missionaries who came to India in the sixteenth century and afterwards. Msgr. Roz S.J. the first Latin bishop of the St. Thomas Christians wrote in 1604:

"...that they (St. Thomas Christians) left Crangannore on account of the many molestations of some, also religious (Portuguese missionaries), who did not understand anything at all that was not of the Latin Rite, and declared everything else at once as heresy and superstition, forcing them to eat fish and drink wine in Lent (fasting days before Easter) against their Rite, though this fasting is more in conformity with the holy canons and the fasting of the original Church"⁴¹.

The St. Thomas Christians, as their Hindu brethren around them, considered fasting and renunciation as the greatest means to have real God experience, to grow in their spirituality.

The fasts were all according to the rhythm of the liturgical cycle, namely, the historic Christ-event and human salvation. Sunday being the eighth day of the week, namely, the eschatological day, the day of Lord's Resurrection, they considered it a non-fasting day all through the ages. But Friday, the day of the

40. Cf. V. PATHIKULANGARA, *Chaldeo-Indian Liturgy I: Introduction*, Kottayam 1982, pp. 61-64; ID., *Mar Thomma Margam*, op. cit., pp. 63-67.

41. G. SCHURHAMMER, *The Malabar Church and Rome*, Thrichinopoly 1934, p. 22.

Church, and Wednesday, the day of the Blessed Virgin Mary, were observed as fasting days through out the year unless there fell any of the important feasts. The other fasting days are the following:

1. *Twenty five-day fast* in preparation for the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ.
2. *Fifty-day fast* in preparation for Resurrection or the Easter celebration.
3. *Eight-day fast* in preparation for the Nativity of Blessed Virgin Mary.
4. *Fifteen-day fast* in preparation for the Assumption of Mary.
5. *Three-day fast* observed eighteen days before commencing the fifty-day fast in thanksgiving for the miraculous rescue of God's people from a devastating epidemic.

The St. Thomas Christians were very particular on three important things in observing fast becomingly: *Prayer, Renunciation and Almsgiving*. During the fasting days all used to spend more time in prayer. This is done either through liturgical celebrations or through personal and common devotional activities. They also renounce consciously something or some act, most dear to them, on those days. Almsgiving or giving away something of their own to others also is considered essential for fasting. It is done either by giving material things to the needy or by helping others physically or intellectually or spiritually. Both the *vertical* and the *horizontal* dimensions of their Christian commitment were thus beautifully displayed in their fasting.

Family Prayer

Family prayer is one of the most impressive devotional practices of

St. Thomas Christians. All the family members used to come together in the evening (very often in the morning too), if possible at a fixed time, and conduct the regular prayers. The father of the family or the one designated by him leads the prayer. The *Liturgy of the Hours* was the important part of this family prayer. During the missionary period it was substituted by rosary devotion. The *Liturgy of the Hours* is again gaining importance today; and it must be so. Bible reading according to the liturgical calendar is also part of the family prayer.

Pilgrimages

The pilgrim character is in-born to Christian commitment. A Christian lives in between the *already* and *not-yet*. He has to fix his eyes always on the *not yet* while he stands firmly on the *already*. The eschatological dimension is basic to Christianity. The Second Vatican Council has beautifully explained the Church as a pilgrim community, always on the march under the leadership of the risen Lord towards the fulfilment in the heavenly Jerusalem.

The pilgrim nature of their Christian existence is proclaimed by the St. Thomas Christians every day during their liturgical celebrations when they all stand under the leadership of the celebrant turned to the East or the Sanctuary or the St. Thomas Cross, the eschatological sign of salvation. The same is proclaimed during the processions both within the liturgical celebrations and those conducted in connection with festivals or funerals.

They also conduct pilgrimages to important shrines or hillocks like Malayattoor in order to bear witness to the basic dimension of their Christian faith, the pilgrim nature.

Such pilgrimages are often conducted after long periods of fasting and renunciation. Special prayers and almsgiving are considered to be part and parcel of this preparation. Most of the pilgrims, at least partially, go on foot in great austerity to fulfil the *vrta* or promise made to God. There are several such pilgrim centres among the St. Thomas Christians. There is all possibility that a kind of commercialism creeps into the management of pilgrim centres. In fact, it happens in modern times. It is up to the authorities concerned to be always vigilant to correct all such malpractices.

The ancient St. Thomas Christians used to make long and tedious pilgrimage to the tomb of their Apostle St. Thomas in Mylapore, Madras. Today also many go on pilgrimage to Mylapore, but mostly in vehicles or by rail.

Birth-Rites

A new-born child is fed with powdered gold, honey or ghee mixed with a herb called *vayambu*. This is considered something essential to add to the physical shape and beauty. *Jatakarma*, the star determining, *Namakarana*, the giving of name, *Annaprāsna*, the rice giving, etc. were all observed by the St. Thomas Christians, but in a Christian way by the presence, prayers and blessing of priests.

They preferred biblical names but with local modifications.⁴² Thus *Thomma* became Thommi, Thomman, Thommachan, etc.; *Mariam* became Mariamma, Kochumariam, Kunjumariam, Mariakutty, etc. The paternal grandfather's or grandmother's name

is given to the first child and the second is named after the maternal line. According to Father Alvaro Penteado, a Portuguese missionary, sometime before baptism, the priest comes home, blesses some legumes and puts some in the mouth of the child, giving it the name.⁴³

Antonio de Monserrate, another Portuguese missionary, describes the rice-giving ceremony as follows:

At the end of six months (after the birth of the child) they are wont to give the child rice, for which they invite their friends and relatives, and the priest come to bless the eating and takes a little from the rice mixed with black dilute sugar (jaggery) and puts it to the mouth of the child; he does not touch the rice with the hand but with a Cross of gold or of gold plated silver, placed inside a circle. After this has been done by the priest, the relatives and friends approach and repeat the action and then all go to eat the best possible (meals).⁴⁴

Children's ornaments were very often made of leopard-claws and mongoose teeth set in gold, all exactly as their Hindu brethren were doing, but always with the addition of the unique symbol of their faith, the glorious Cross, namely, Cross without the crucified figure of Jesus.

Death-Rites

There are several special rituals among the St. Thomas Christians in connection with death, burial and after burial. Most of these are the

42. P. J. PODIPARA, *Nammude Ritu* (Our Rite, in Malayalam), Mannanam 1951, p. 35.

43. Mentioned in A. M. MUNDADAN, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

44. Quoted in *Ibid.*

same as those of their Hindu brethren.⁴⁵

When somebody dies, no food would be prepared or eaten in that house, till after the burial. After burial, the priest would bless a tender coconut, drink a little of its water, and then share it with the nearest relatives as a sign of participation in their sorrow. Then follows a purely vegetarian meal, presided over by priests. They call this ceremony *Nalothu*. The priests conduct special prayers on this occasion and renew the blessing of the house. The devotees are given the St. Thomas Cross to be kissed and ordinary cumin seed to be tasted. Feeding or giving alms to the poor according to one's ability is part of the burial rites.

Pulakuli, namely, the conclusion of austere defilement in connection with death and burial varies from region to region. Normally that comes between seven to seventeen days. In some cases it is extended even to the forty-first day. Besides the special liturgical celebrations in the church and prayer at the tomb, there are also special prayers at home by the priests and a vegetarian meal following them. The prayers and rituals at home are similar to those of *Nalothu* celebration.

Chatham is the celebration almost in the same pattern as *pulakuli* on the death-anniversary day. The meal in connection may be also non-vegetarian. During all such occasions the relatives and faithful may also offer some money in suffrage for the departed. The *Chatham* of the father of the family is observed every year, but less solemnly, by the children in several places.

Other Celebrations

The *Passover meal* that is eaten in every St. Thomas Christian family on Maundy Thursday night is something unique in the whole of Christendom. For that, a special kind of bread, the *Kurisappam* and a sweet drink are prepared in every house. After special prayers, the father of the family breaks the bread and distributes it to everyone. All eat it standing and drink the sweet liquid. It appears to be a popular but beautiful combination of the Jewish pass-over meal and the Christian Eucharist in a native style.

Some of the St. Thomas Christians may sometimes make some *vrta*s or *Nerchas* (promises) in relation to favours obtained or to be obtained from God. Some of them have already taken the form of solemn devotional practices. The *Nercha of the twelve Apostles* is one among such practices. For that there is proper liturgical celebration in the church and then a popular form of washing the feet of twelve children either in the church or at home together with sumptuous meals served to those children and the celebrating priest. Very often relatives and friends are also invited on such occasions.

There is also a *Nercha* of the Holy Family which they call *Muthiyullu* (giving meals to an old lady). For this they give sumptuous meals and in some areas also good dresses to a poor father, mother and child.

Sitting in Bhajana is another popular devotion among the women folk for obtaining the favour of children. Such devotees spend the

45. Cf. J. AERTHAYIL, *The Spiritual Heritage of the St. Thomas Christians*, 1982, pp. 49-51.

whole day in prayer and fasting in the churches or shrines, beginning with the morning Eucharistic celebration. When there are a considerable number of devotees at some time, priests may also give exhortations to them. On such occasions the neighbours used to provide for the daily necessities of those devotees. This practice is very common during the *eighty-day fast* in preparation for the Nativity celebration of the Blessed Virgin Mary.⁴⁶

Discordance

In the Middle Ages, there was discordance in the Latin Church regarding the liturgical spirituality just as in several other fields of Christian life. An arrangement of the liturgical year, giving undue importance to the feasts of Saints, overshadowing even the centrality of the Christ-event, began to wield its influence. The Latin Church and the latinized Oriental Churches, for example the Syro-Malabar Church, have not yet succeeded in liberating themselves from its clutches. The Second Vatican Council, therefore, stresses the need for the renewal of the Liturgical Year and the inculcation of a spirituality based on that (SC 102-111). Personal and popular devotions are all to be arranged or rearranged according to the order of the proper liturgical year. The Council teaches:

“...But such devotions should be so drawn up that they harmonize with the liturgical seasons, accord with the sacred liturgy, are in some way derived from it, and lead the people to it, since in fact the liturgy by its very nature is far superior to any of them” (SC 13).

After the Council

Thirty years have passed after

the second Vatican Council. But, it is strange that the Syro-Malabar bishops are still reluctant in implementing the demands of the Council. Most of them appear to rest satisfied, encouraging some popular devotions, forced upon this Church by the Western missionaries during the colonial period.

Monthly devotions (e. g. March devotion to St. Joseph, May devotion to Mary, Rosary devotion of October, November devotion to souls in Purgatory...) various kinds of novenas, etc., are clearly not in accordance with the arrangement and spirit of the Syro-Malabar liturgical year. It does not mean that these devotions are to be left out at once. But something must be done for rearranging them in accordance with the liturgical seasons by way of assimilation and for encouraging the liturgical spirituality in all celebrations.

Liturgical Spirituality

Holy Eucharist, Sacraments, Sacramentals and the Liturgy of the Hours celebrated according to the rhythm, the spirit and order of the proper liturgical year, is the way offered in the Catholic Churches for personal transfiguration to Jesus Christ. This is the norm both in the Eastern and Western traditions. Each one has to do it as far as possible in one's own particular ecclesial heritage. All other devotions must somehow help this growth into Jesus Christ (SC 12-13). Devotions which do not satisfy this goal must be discarded; those which are useful must be accepted and, if needed, modified. This is the only way to nature the liturgical spirituality, and it is an important obligation of the leaders of the Church.

46. Cf. ID., pp. 170-174.

Revolutionary Renewals

The Syro-Malabar Church, which has just regained her full autonomy and is growing fast to the fullness of her identity needs a revolutionary change in the field of liturgical spirituality. Now it is a Church which gives emphasis to personal, individualistic and popular devotions rather than liturgical and ecclesial celebrations. Something should be done to liberate her from this deplorable condition. Those who sincerely examine the attitude of the Syro-Malabarians towards the liturgical celebrations like, the Eucharist, Sacraments, Sacramentals and Liturgy of the Hours can easily understand this reality. They must consider it in comparison with their attitude towards the devotions such as rosary, monthlies, novenas and so on. A mixing up of both the liturgical rites and popular devotions of piety is also very common. On such occasions, very often, one does violence to the liturgical rites by giving excessive importance to the popular devotions!

Indianization, Inculturation

Besides, under the labels of Indianization, inculturation and modernization, some people are engaged in a kind of pruning, adding, removing and changing the ancient, original liturgical texts and rites. The consequence is that the liturgy becomes more and more superficial and ridiculous.

“... a hurried experimentation – as others which have been made in these years – can only have as result to perturb and divide the Church: and offer only abstract and unacceptable products in an area where every superfi-

ality and mere approximation is absolutely to be banned”⁴⁷.

Temporary adjustments can never become satisfactory. It is to such people that Pope Pius XI said in 1934: “Half measures are neither fruitful nor generous”. Will those people hearken to such salvific advice from the Magisterium?

Difficulties Should be faced

Without pain, seldom can a mother give birth to her child. In search of truth one will have to face even greater difficulties. Pope John Paul II, addressing the Syro-Malabar bishops on August 29, 1980, said:

“... Difficulties will not be lacking in the field of returning to the genuine sources of one's own Rite. It is a question, nevertheless, of difficulties which must be faced *viribus unitis* and *Deo adjuvante* (uniting the powers and God helping)”⁴⁸.

Basic Steps

A basic renewal itself is needed in the case of popular devotions in the Syro-Malabar Church. It is shameful and dangerous to continue with monthlies and novena devotions which are forsaken and discarded even by the Western Church. The Syro-Malabar Church inherits the celebration of a liturgical year which is qualified by eminent scholars as a beautiful celebration of the salvation accomplished in Jesus Christ. The popular devotions of this Church should be originating from and leading to the proper celebration of her own liturgical seasons (SC 13) and not that of the Latin Church. The monthly devotions never go with it.

47. Vatican Document of 1980, cf. *Christian Orient* 15/2-3 (1994) 78.

48. *L'Osservatore Romano*, 30 agosto 1980, p. 2.

Hence the need for basic steps in this regard!

Eastern Churches as Models

In order to grow in the liturgical and ecclesial spirituality, their brethren in the Malankara and Jacobite Churches are to some extent helpful to the Syro-Malabarians. The inferiority complex, which arises from the concept that whatever is Eastern and indigenous is uncultured and rude, and whatever is foreign and Western is cultured and progressive, keeps them back and leaves them inactive.

"... This 'return to the sources' is definitely not a 'going-back', as some could think who consider 'Oriental things are backward' and who have been trained in an anti-Oriental bias, who ignore the value of their ancestral Rite and Ecclesial Tradition and who fear it might be irrelevant to contemporary man of whatever milieu or an obstacle to modern progress".⁴⁹

The challenge before them is to overcome all such barriers, find out their ecclesial identity, accept it and help its authentic and organic growth.

Desire and Hope

Let the Syro-Malabarians, facing all difficulties, search, understand and be convinced of the role of liturgical celebrations such as the Eucharist, Sacraments, Sacramentals and the Liturgy of the Hours in their Christian life and experience them most intimately. Let them not run here and there after the so-called popular devotions and movements! Let the liturgical celebrations be the most important items of the Feast celebrations in their parishes and insti-

tutions. There are liturgical celebrations to suit any time of the day in their Syriac sources: *Ramsa*, the Evening Liturgy, *Lelja*, the Night Liturgy, *Sapra*, the Morning Liturgy and *Endana*, the Noon Liturgy can beautifully help them to celebrate the various hours of the day. Then there are the Sacramentals to suit various occasions and situations. Why do they conveniently forsake these prayers and rites and go after superficial, very often merely emotional and accommodated prayer forms? Let them give importance on such occasions to liturgical celebrations, mortifications and almsgiving and bid farewell to unnecessary expenses which are induced by false pride and rude habits.

Conclusion

Those who analyze the pre-sixteenth century life-style of the Thomas Christians of India, can easily understand that this Christianity continued to develop the early Christian spiritual vision in its own way. But during the colonial and imperial period after the sixteenth century they were forced to subscribe to several European popular devotions such as the monthly devotions, novenas, etc. Most of them are not in tune with their liturgical genius and hence torpedo their authentic spiritual equilibrium. The Europeans themselves have left aside several of them as they are not in agreement with the directions given by Vatican II documents (SC 12, 13). In spite of all such historical vicissitudes, the kernel of their spiritual vision still remains. Their spiritual life was based on their liturgical celebrations and all other devotions were related to them. The Second Vatican Council and all existent ecclesial documents emphasize only this kind of spiritual life in Christianity, especially in the Catholic tradition.

49. Vatican Document of 1985, cf. *Christian Orient* 15/2-3 (1994) 116.

Hence the duty of the Thomas Christians of India to propose their ancient and authentic life-style as a model to all other Christians! The

laxity shown in this case by the members of this Church, especially, the bishops, priests and religious, can in no way be excused.

Prof. Varghese Pathikulangara CMI

Book Review

Antony Kakkanatt, Christological Catechism of the Liturgy. A study on the Great Feasts of Our Lord. Published by Mar Thoma Yogam Rome, 1996. Pp. 1 - XX + 362. Price not given.

This excellent work is a doctoral dissertation which was publicly defended at the Pontifical Salesian University, Rome in 1995. Its aim is to analyze the content and nature of the Christological Catechism of the Malankara Church with special emphasis on the liturgy of the great Feasts of Our Lord, namely Yaldo (Christmas), Denho (Epiphany), Maalto (the entrance of the Lord into Temple), Qyomto (Easter), Suloko (ascension), Pentecost, Mtale (the feast of the Transfiguration). This thesis is divided into five chapters. The first chapter explains the origin and development, the liturgical celebration and the theological meaning of the great feasts. The second chapter presents the figure of Christ of these feasts. The third chapter deals with the salvific role of Christ. The catechetical dimension of the feasts are examined in the fourth chapter. The fifth chapter affirms the adequateness and authenticity of the christological catechism of the feasts.

Liturgy is an on-going catechism of the Church. The catechism of the liturgy implies the catechetical pedagogy and the content. Liturgy as a celebration of the church is a catechetical action. Since Christ and his salvific events are the content of the liturgy it is Christological. This thesis presents the liturgical Christology of the Malankara Church. The author reminds that each church should have its own catechism. The catechism of the Malankara Church should lead the faithful to an authentic worship in that church. The author suggests that the feasts should be properly celebrated bearing in mind their theological and catechetical importance.

Dr. Thomas Mannooramparampil

News

Eastern and Latin Theological Traditions mutually Complement

Pope John Paul II said in his address on 4th August 1996 at Castel Gandolfo that the Eastern and Latin theological traditions complement each other. There is a great element of unity between the Christianity of the East and of the West, and this is seen in the writings of the Fathers of the Church. There existed a fruitful exchange of ideas between the East and the West.

The Pope referred to the unique influence the two schools of the East—one at Alexandria in Egypt and the other at Antioch in Syria—had in theological reflection. Both these schools developed two complementary viewpoints in their reflection on the truths of the faith, especially on the mystery of Incarnation.

The West was influenced by this Eastern thinking in such a way that one could not distinguish between the Eastern from the Western tradition. The Holy Father mentioned the names of St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory of Nazianzen and St. John Chrisostom as the Holy Hierarchs of the East. Among the Fathers and Doctors of the West the Holy Father mentioned a series from St. Ambrose to St. Augustine, from St. Jerome to St. Gregory—the great and others. He concluded the speech saying that “the Fathers still speak to us and deserve to be employed to ever greater benefit in theology and Christian formation”, faithfulness to their teaching will facilitate our vision of full ecclesial unity.

Two New Hierarchs to the Kerala Latin Hierarchy

Holy Father Pope John Paul II has appointed as Metropolitan Archbishop of Verapoly, India, Dr. Daniel Acharuparampil, OCD, and as the first bishop of the newly erected diocese of Neyyatinkara, Dr. Vincent Samuel. Dr. Acharuparampil is currently professor of Philosophy and Spirituality at the Pontifical Urban University, Rome where he was also Rector from 1988 to 1994. He is also a consultant to the congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. Dr. Vincent Samuel is the Vice-Rector and Professor of the Theology faculty at Mangalapuzha, Alwaye, India.

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